

Witness Projection Plan

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 30 November 2025

Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. As always, if you'd like to learn a little more about us, you can go to FCCGreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. We are all about getting into the Word of God, but most of all, letting that Word get into us and transform these hearts. Now, we are in the third week of our Christmas series called Word Alive.

We're going to be in John 1, 6 through 8, and the title of the message today is Witness Projection Program. Sammy the Bull Gravano, Henry Hill, Frank Lucas, Joseph the Animal Barboza, Nicky Barnes.

What do these names have in common? Each of them were felons who came clean and cooperated with the authorities so they could arrest some of the most notorious criminals in American history.

For example, Sammy Gravano was called the Bull for a reason because he helped the FBI to take down John Gotti. But you know, these names also have this in common.

[1 : 10] Each of them were in the Witness Protection Program, or the WPP, that is overseen by the U.S. Marshals to protect, relocate, and financially assist witnesses and their families who are thought to be in danger because of working with the authorities.

Now, you may be wondering, what does this have to do with Christmas? I mean, Ray, it's November the 30th. Thanksgiving is over, and it's the start of the Advent season.

Well, my answer to you is it has absolutely nothing to do with Christmas other than I want to play off those words, Witness Protection Program, as we are going to learn today through a powerful example that we are in the Witness Projection Program as followers of Christ.

So as cheesy as I am right now, grab your paper Bibles or your Holy Glow, a.k.a. your phone, and head towards the Gospel of John, chapter 1, verses 6 through 8.

About four-fifths the way through your Bible, John 1, starting in verse 6. And as you're turning there, let's just do a little recap of this incredibly powerful and deep section of Scripture that we're tackling this Christmas called Word Alive.

[2 : 27] So far, we've debunked those claims that some cults have that Jesus isn't God. And we've learned that He is the eternal God existing forever before and after creation.

Now, it's hard to wrap our minds around that amazing truth, but it's okay because He is God and I am not. He's also the Creator who made everything out of nothing in that He is omnipotent.

That means He's all-powerful. He's part of the triune Godhead, three-in-one, Father, Son, Holy Spirit. He is life as He is the self-existent One who gives life to us, His children.

He is the light of the world. And today, we're going to continue talking about Jesus as the light as we see a fantastic example of the witness projection program.

Now, if you remember last week, we talked about how you can't disconnect those last two attributes of Jesus, life and light.

[3 : 34] Because Jesus' life is what shines as a light into the darkness of this world, even the darkness of our own hearts. He changes everything.

And when we finally make that decision to step out of the darkness of our own sin, surrendering everything to His Lordship, we walk in the light as He is in the light.

And I'm telling you, there's nothing like walking with Jesus. I didn't say just going to church. I didn't say just following a set of religious rules. There's nothing like an intimate, personal walk with the God of the universe.

So let's read our passage today. John 1. Let's start in verse 6 here. God's Word says, Okay, so let's make this clear.

It's the Apostle John writing this gospel by the Holy Spirit's leading. But this passage is talking about a man known as John the Baptist.

[4 : 53] Not because he started the Baptist church, but because he was John the Baptizer. So let's just spend a few minutes painting this picture of John the Baptizer's life starting around 700 years before he was even born.

See, in Isaiah 40, verse 3, the prophet foretells about John when he says this. He says, A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. And listen, all four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, directly link that passage as talking about John the Baptist who was born 700 years later.

And now we come to this story of his birth, where in Luke chapter 1, we're introduced to his godly parents. His dad, Zechariah, was a priest serving God faithfully.

Elizabeth was a Proverbs 31 woman. But sadly, they couldn't have children. They were heartbroken. And now scripture says they were very old.

[6 : 01] And one day as Zechariah was chosen to go into the temple of the Lord, and burn incense, which would have been just a special honor, an extreme privilege. And it says that an angel of the Lord met him there.

And he was freaked out. You would have been too. Me too. Gripped with fear, it says. And then look at Luke 1, starting in verse 13. But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah.

Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. Now let's jump down to verse 16. He will bring many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

And he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

So here's the thing. Zechariah responded back to the angel Gabriel with human doubt that you and I struggle with too. And because of this, he couldn't speak until his son arrived.

[7 : 11] And yes, his wife, well beyond childbearing years, she became pregnant. Absolute miracle. And in the sixth month of her pregnancy, her relative Mary carrying the Savior in her womb, and we're told when she comes and visits Elizabeth that John, also in the womb, leapt for joy.

When he was born, instead of following the norm of naming him after his father, Zechariah insisted on what the angel had said, that his name shall be John.

The boy grew into a man. He began preaching a baptism of repentance. We're talking about the first true prophet of God in Israel in over 400 years.

And listen, John was not a feel-good, just-tell-you-all-the-warm-and-toasty-stuff kind of preacher. He boldly called people to repentance of their sin.

He called us to a life of holiness according to God's word. And look what it says here in Mark 1.5. It says, So man, we're talking a major revival.

[8 : 26] It says, Skip two verses. Verse 7. So this guy was being used by God to bring a lot of people to repentance of sin to prepare their hearts for the Messiah.

And then one day, Jesus shows up at the Jordan River and he asked to be baptized by John. But John makes it clear, No way, man. I should be baptized by you.

Not the other way around. But Jesus insisted so that he could fulfill all righteousness. And finally, John acted in obedience. Church, I am so grateful that the Lord has allowed me to be a part of hundreds of baptisms in two decades of ministry.

But John, the baptizer, man, he has the ultimate one-upper from any preacher. He baptized Jesus. I mean, what did he say when he baptized him? I baptize you in the name of the Father, you, and the Holy Spirit.

And for several months, maybe even up to a year, some scholars think, John continued preaching and baptizing while Jesus was doing the same.

[9 : 47] until John was arrested for calling out Herod the Tetrarch for his ungodly behavior, which eventually led to his death by beheading.

And I love the words that Jesus said about him in Luke 7, 28. He said, I tell you, among those born of a woman, or of women, there is no one greater than John.

And we know Jesus mourned the death of this great prophet who faithfully preached the word, preparing the hearts of the people for the King of Kings. And while that's John's life in a nutshell, I mean, there's more details, but I just wanted, especially for those of you who are newer to the Bible, I wanted you to get that big picture of John the baptizer's life.

But now let's spend the rest of our time just learning from John about how to walk in faith. And the reason this is important is because we can learn so much from others.

I think about some of the different people that God has brought in my life over the last 25 years who were somewhat of a mentor-like figure to me, whether they even realized it or not.

[10 : 56] From Steve Abernathy, that I learned how to love people well and stay faithful to Jesus even when it's hard. He always told me when I was really young in ministry, just freaking out about something, he'd say, Ray, listen, no matter what happens, Jesus is still on his throne.

From Bob Kirsten, I learned the power of prayer and faithfulness to the church. From Kelly Rehart, I've learned the importance of encouraging others and laughing as we walk in the joy of the Lord.

From Brian Poling, I've learned how to be considerate and thoughtful towards others, paying attention to the little things that truly matter. From Jerry and Jenny Holdman, I've learned what it looks like to fiercely love your spouse.

From Martha Greve, I've learned how vital it is that we know and study Scripture to grow closer to Christ. I could keep going, but let's look at a couple things here that we can learn from John's faithful example.

And here's the first thing. Like John the Baptizer, we have purpose. You were made on purpose for a purpose.

[12 : 04] Now, if you read the accounts of John's life in all four Gospels, I'm telling you, this guy was laser focused on his purpose to prepare the way for the Messiah.

John 1.6 even makes it known that he was sent from God on mission. Even in Mark 1.6, it says this, John wore clothing made of camel's hair with leather belt around his waist, and he ate locust and wild honey.

And I think sometimes when we read that with our 21st century American minds not understanding context and even the push back to the Old Testament with that passage, I think we just look at that and say, okay, the guy's a little bit odd, but that's okay, right?

We're all a little odd in different ways. But listen, there really is some significance to this passage about what he wore and what he ate. The reason this is mentioned is because he is fulfilling prophecy.

As Luke 1.17 says, he came in the spirit and the power of Elijah. And what do we read about Elijah in 2 Kings 1.8? It says, they replied, he had a garment of hair and had a leather belt around his waist.

[13 : 17] So you got this guy in the desert living off the land, preaching a message of repentance like Elijah did 850 to 900 years earlier. And the people of Israel would have made this connection when they came from all around to hear, to repent, and to be baptized by John.

See, he wore very primitive, simple, even old-fashioned for the day, clothing, because he didn't care about the styles. Even eating locusts and wild honey focused on one thing, his purpose in the Lord.

And listen, I don't care the clothing you wear. I don't care about what you choose to wear. I don't care about the food that you choose to eat. No judgment here. But listen, I admire a cool pair of Jordans as much as the next guy.

But the point here is that we can get so caught up in earthly things like that. Even maybe pass it down to our kids where they got to have the best too and they got to try to look the coolest and be the most stylish.

Meanwhile, John the Baptizer is teaching us that none of that matters in the end. What matters is how you and me live out our purpose in Christ.

[14 : 35] That's what counts for eternity. Who are the lives God has used you or me to influence, to lead to his throne. And here's the cool thing.

You're going to do that differently than I. You have a different personality. Probably a better one. You may have different gifts and passions that the Lord has wired into you so that you can be faithful to his call over your life.

And I want to do something kind of unique this morning. Anytime I talk about this topic, my mind goes back to a song released in 1994 by Ray Bolts called Thank You.

And if you watch the music videos, the hair is big, the outfits are funny, but the song is powerful. And so I just want to read you a good portion of what Ray Bolts sang in this song called Thank You.

Here's verse 1. He said, I dreamed I went to heaven and you were there with me. We walked along the streets of gold beside the crystal sea. We heard the angel singing.

[15 : 38] Then someone called your name. You turned and saw this young man and he was smiling as he came. And he said, Friend, you may not know me now. And then he said, But wait, you used to teach my Sunday school when I was only eight.

And every week, you'd say a prayer before the class would start. And one day when you said that prayer, I asked Jesus in my heart. And then verse 2. Then another man stood before you and said, Remember the time a missionary came to your church and his pictures made you cry?

You didn't have much money, but you gave it anyway. Jesus took that gift you gave and that's why I'm here today. And then the last verse says this.

One by one they came. Far as the eye could see, each life somehow touched by your generosity. Little things you had done, sacrifices made, unnoticed on the earth, in heaven, now proclaimed.

And I know that up in heaven, you're not supposed to cry, but I'm almost sure there were tears in your eyes. As Jesus took your hand and you stood before the Lord, he said, My child, look around you, for great is your reward.

[16 : 51] And then the chorus starts out, thank you for giving to the Lord. So very simple here. Ephesians 2.10, For we are God's handiwork or masterpiece created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared for in advance for us to do.

Not to be saved by those good works, but because we are saved to do those good works. And like John the baptizer, we have purpose in Jesus.

And I love how Anne Graham Lotz, the daughter of Billy Graham, put this. She said, Reject low living, reject sight walking, small planning, casual praying, and limited giving.

God has chosen you for greatness. You are part of the Witness Projection Program. And that leads us into one more point that we need to discuss here.

Like John the baptizer, we have perspective. As born again, redeemed, children of God, we should have the proper perspective that listen, it's all about Jesus.

[18 : 05] Because when you look around at the culture around us, where almost every commercial makes it all about you, your wants, your pleasures, your happiness, being immersed in this culture constantly, man, it's easy to have that BK mentality, that Burger King mentality.

Have it your way. It's all about you. And yet, as followers of the light, we know differently. We are set apart. We are called to look different than our world.

Have you noticed that while we're the most blessed people materialistically in the history of the world, depression rates have never been higher? Why? Because that's what happens when we make life all about me and having it my way.

Selfishness and stuff, that can't fill the void. But when Jesus is first, there's freedom, there's contentment, there's peace, there's joy, and there is hope.

Now look back at John 1 in our passage, and let's read verses 7 and 8 here. Talking about John the baptizer, here's what the word says. He came as a witness, key word, witness, to testify concerning that light, so that through him, Jesus, all might believe.

[19 : 22] He himself, John the baptist, was not the light. He came only as a witness to the light. So church, this is really refreshing to me because in a church culture where we have the tendency to turn people that God has blessed, to take people that God has blessed with gifts, especially in preaching or maybe even worship music, and God's given that for the benefit of the church, we like to turn them into celebrities, which often ends with a prideful fall.

And then we see John, who Jesus himself calls the greatest person to ever live. John makes it abundantly clear that this isn't about him. It's all about Jesus. And twice in this passage, we see the word witness.

John was not the light. He came as a witness to tell of the light. And when we say that we are a part of the witness projection program, that doesn't mean the witness is getting projected because we don't want that to happen.

It means the witness is the one doing the projecting of Jesus. And we read a beautiful example of this in John chapter 3. See, at this point, Jesus and John are both preaching and baptizing.

And one day, John's disciples and all rabbis, all teachers had disciples, young students under them. So John's disciples come to him and they say, hey, Jesus is also baptizing.

[20 : 49] I mean, it seems like their competitive side has come out and they're getting a little jealous that their crowds are going down and Jesus' crowd is going up and Jesus is getting more attention all of a sudden. And while it would have been so easy for the pride to creep in, while our flesh loves getting that praise, watch John the Baptist's response in chapter 3, 28 through 30.

He says, you yourselves can testify that I said, I am not the Messiah, but I am sent ahead of him. The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice.

He says, that joy is mine and it is now complete. Now, here's my favorite verse of all time, my life verse that I absolutely love and do my best to live by even though I fail often.

Verse 30 of John 3, he, Jesus, he must become greater and I must become less. Say that with me.

Jesus must become greater and I must become less. Can you imagine the difference this would make in your own life and in the life of those around you?

[22 : 08] Just picture a Tuesday at work, okay? Whatever your work looks like. You've already gotten up and you've spent some time in the light. You've soaked in the word. You've prayed and laid it all down at Jesus' feet and now as imperfect as we are, you're ready to let the Holy Spirit guide your day.

And by the way, if you're not doing that, it'll make all the difference. So instead of letting the selfish distractions from the coworkers take you down the same gossipy path, instead of your primary objective being to get that raise or that promotion and I'm going to step over whoever gets in my way, now, because I'm a follower of Jesus, because I'm set apart, I'm different, my heart is to be a great member of the Witness Projection Program.

From the grace of God I have received in my life, I choose to show love and compassion, pointing others to Jesus. My integrity, standing on the truth, will not be moved by any worldly gain.

My servant-hearted attitude and kindness has to shine through. And trust me, you do that long enough, faithfully enough, consistent enough, and it will open doors for you to share the hope that you have in Christ because you will shine and you will put a spotlight on Jesus because others will see that witness projection and they will want that light to shine into the darkness of their own life.

Now, think about what that looks like in the church. Have you ever noticed that just because we all love Jesus doesn't mean we see everything the same? You ever notice that?

[23 : 46] I hope you have. But how does that change our culture when we have a church family full of people who don't stomp, pout, and take their ball and go home when they don't get their way? What happens when we choose Christ-like humility and selflessness in the body of Christ?

What about when we actually deal with things balancing love and truth? What happens when the biblical vision and mission of our church comes before my preferences and what I want?

I'll tell you what happens. WPP. Because when you walk into a Sunday worship service for the first time, you can often tell in the first few minutes whether this is a genuinely loving church family or if we just got a bunch of people going through the motions.

So, what a great example that John the Baptizer was of living out the purpose that God had for him while also keeping it all in perspective that it's all about Jesus.

And you know what? We don't have to go through the motions. We don't have to fake it until we make it. We can know him. We can walk in his light as we shine that spotlight on Jesus.

[24 : 59] So, welcome. Welcome home to a church family. Listen, that's not perfect but a church family that loves you. Welcome home to the Witness Projection Program.

So, here's how the Word of God challenges us today and I'll leave you with Jesus' words in Matthew 5.16. He said, let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just thank you for the Word of God and how you have just used your truth to speak into our hearts.

Father, we pray that you will help us to look more like Jesus, that you will mold and shape us more and more into the image of Christ and we thank you that our job is not to shine a spotlight on ourselves or even on our particular church but to shine that light bright on Jesus.

He's the one that changes lives. So, Father, thank you thank you that you went to the cross and you gave your innocent life for all of our sins that when we had sinned, Jesus, you went to the cross to bear the sins of the world upon your shoulders as the innocent Lamb of God and you died to take our place to pay the price that our sins deserve and then, Jesus, you rose again three days later to conquer death and offer life to all who would pick up their cross and follow you.

[26 : 43] So, thank you, Jesus, for loving us. Thank you for your amazing grace and we pray all of this in your precious and holy name. And God's people said, amen and amen.

Hey, real quick, thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you for tuning in today. Once again, I'm Ray Sweet, the lead pastor at First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. If you'd like to connect with us, maybe you just have some questions about the church, maybe you have questions about faith, maybe you want to talk about following Jesus and what that actually means according to the word of God.

Well, here's the thing, we would love to sit down with you, to talk to you on the phone, to email with you. So here's a couple ways you can make that first contact. Once again, First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana.

My name is Ray. You can call us at 812-663-8488 or you can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

And hey, if you're one of those who has been listening to this program of the word of God every week, we just want to say thank you. Thank you so much.

[27 : 57] We pray that God's word is just ministering to your heart in a big way. And if God is using it, would you do us a favor if you're able? Would you just shoot us an email at ray at fccgreensburg.com and just let us know what God is doing through the teaching of his word.

But thank you so much for listening. Hey, God bless you. Have a great week.