

May You Be Covered In His Dust

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[0 : 00] Hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. Thank you for tuning in to this radio broadcast. We are all about just preaching the Word of God, getting into the Word, but most of all, letting the Word of God get into us and transform our hearts as we seek to be disciples of Jesus.

I want to wish you a Happy New Year. I know that we're already eight days in at this point, but I was gone last week, getting a little bit of a breather from the crazy Christmas season that can be so busy around the church.

But I do appreciate Pastor Steve. He stepped in, did a great job last week, challenging us to seek the heart of the Lord as we go deeper in 2023, as we realize that our God never changes and He is always faithful.

And today I want to start a new series that will take us all the way to Easter. So grab your Bibles for me. Turn about two-thirds, three-quarters of the way into the Scriptures, to the New Testament, to the Gospel of Mark.

It is the second book right after Matthew, the second book of the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, then you come to Luke and John. Listen, if all this is brand new to you, maybe you've never really opened up the Bible before, it's okay.

[1 : 21] You've got to start somewhere. I've been where you are, and every Bible has a table of contents in the front. And if you'll go ahead and look and find the book of Mark, that would be great. Now, I don't mean to get all gushy on you here in 2023, but do you mind if I just kind of open up my heart to you a little bit today?

A lot of people think that pastors and their families just have it all together. Somehow they're just perfect, that life is always just easy, stress-free, and a bowl full of sunshine.

And they just don't deal with the struggles, the emotions, the worries, the frustrations that maybe you deal with day in and day out. And yet I could tell you that while I wish that were true, it couldn't be further from the truth.

We are just as human as you trying to follow Jesus and sometimes not even doing such a great job of it, okay? So let me share something with you, just being kind of vulnerable for a second.

This is a parenting struggle. Bethany and I, we waited about five years to start our family. So I was a month away from being 30 when our firstborn, Joes, came into this world.

[2 : 28] And I'll tell you, we fell in love with the little guy with the big personality immediately. And we've probably spoiled him and the girls rotten. But I can tell you that Joes has always been a mama's boy.

And I've always found this interesting about him. But up until just a few years ago, it was almost like he felt like he had to always choose between Bethany and I. Almost like he couldn't love and be affectionate to both of us at the same time.

And there was this one time where he just shattered my heart. We were living in Rushville at the time in ministry. He was probably 18-ish months old.

And I had just walked in the door from working all day long. I don't even remember what had happened that day, but it was a rough day for whatever reason. And I was just relieved to be done and at home with my family.

Bethany, like always, greeted me with a warm hug and kiss. But Joes wasn't so warm. In fact, as soon as he saw me, he said, go to work. Go back to work.

[3 : 33] And he just kept telling me to leave, to leave. And I'll tell you, I know that I was the adult in that situation and he was only like 18 months. But it absolutely wrecked me.

And in my pity party, I was over here like, fine. Here I am dealing with all this junk today, working hard so that you guys can stay home. And this is how I'm treated. Am I just that bad of a dad that my toddler doesn't want anything to do with me?

Now, here's the good news. In the last two to three years, he has really buddied up with me. And there's been a couple times where it's just been the two of us. And he said something like this. Daddy, when I grow up, I want to be just like you. And I got to tell you, that wrecked me in a good way. And I was like, yeah, take that, toddler Joes.

And then I also got this picture that we took of my two girls, Jovi and Lila. And they're actually both standing in a pair of my shoes.

[4 : 36] So these giant shoes on their feet and they're smiling. And I can't help, as I come here to this series called Disciple, to think about what a disciple was in the days of Jesus.

As I think about my own kids trying to show them a great example and disciple them, I can't help but to think about what did this process look like in the days of Jesus.

Well, for someone who was aspiring to be a rabbi, which was a tall order, they only took the best of the best. Here's what the process would have looked like.

They literally would have packed their bags. So after the school age years are over, probably around what we would call college age, these very educated young men would pack their bags and they would go and leave everything behind and basically follow a rabbi for years.

I mean, for years. I mean, eight or ten years maybe before they could actually be a rabbi themselves. They would live among him, among where he lived. They would eat with him, watch him, learn from him, do life with him.

[5 : 45] They tried to be just like him. That was the picture of a disciple in the first century, just totally immersing themselves in trying to be like that rabbi.

And I know I've shared this with you before, but there developed a blessing that other rabbis would say over these disciples. They would say, may you be covered in the dust of your rabbi.

See, as he went all over the place teaching, they would often walk decent amounts of distance. And so, as you can imagine, you got this little pack of disciples following the rabbi.

And as he would walk through whatever element it was, he would inadvertently just kick up the dust off of his feet. And it would kind of cake on the front of these disciples.

So, by the time they got somewhere, they were covered in dirt. And that saying basically meant, may you be so close to your rabbi that you become just like him.

[6 : 45] May you be covered in his dust. And so, as we come here to the book written by John Mark, known as Mark. John Mark was a disciple of the Apostle Peter and ultimately a disciple of Jesus.

But we see this kind of sub-theme, this thread that runs throughout the book. The main theme of Mark is Jesus Christ, the servant-hearted Son of God.

And Mark is writing this to primarily a Roman audience. So, not a Jewish audience, but a Gentile audience. And he's trying to convince them that Jesus is the Son of God.

But throughout the book, we see how the Lord calls us to respond to his Godship, to his example, to his Lordship over our lives.

And while we could spend a year just walking verse by verse through the book of Mark, we're actually just going to do this book in three months. Okay? And we're going to focus on passages that help us to see what a true disciple of Jesus looks like.

[7 : 48] Now, join me here in Mark 1. You should be there with me. And let's start in verse 1. And let's look at the introduction to this gospel, to the good news of Jesus Christ.

Here's what Mark 1, starting in verse 1, says. The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way.

A voice of one calling in the wilderness, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

Now, I love how Mark, right off the bat, just takes them to the scriptures and the prophecies that have been fulfilled in Christ, and specifically here in John the Baptist.

And he quotes from Isaiah and Malachi about this messenger who will go before the Messiah to prepare the way. Now, if you understand the culture that these prophets lived in, it was customary for a messenger to prepare the way when a king was going to visit an area.

The roads would be repaired, the people would be prepared, and as we often say, the table would be set for his arrival. But this wasn't any ordinary king.

[9 : 05] And this wasn't just any old messenger. This was the king of kings, Jesus. And this was John the Baptist, who Jesus would call the greatest born of a woman in Matthew chapter 11, the last and the greatest of the prophets.

This was Jesus, the son of God, who was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of a virgin. And this was John the Baptist, whose birth was miraculous in that his parents were way past childbearing years. And even as Mary, when she had Jesus in her womb and she visited Elizabeth, who had John in hers, the Gospel of Luke says that John the Baptist leaped for joy in her womb at the sound of Mary's voice, knowing that the Messiah was near.

How cool is that? So, here's what I want us to see today. I want to look at these opening verses and what they teach us about John the Baptist, about his heart to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Because here's the thing. We live in a crazy world that is ever-changing and not always for the good. We live in a world where wrong is called right and right is called wrong. We live in a day where it's becoming more and more dangerous to actually believe that the Word of God is perfect and absolute truth, that there is no error in it.

[10 : 27] So, if you and I are actually going to hold on to stay faithful to Jesus until the very end, if we are going to shine and impact our world for Christ, then we need to understand what we're called to be as his disciple and the hope that we can walk in every day, even into eternity.

Now, if you would like to take notes, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app. It's absolutely free. It is incredible. Put on by a church or else it would cost.

The YouVersion Bible app. You can go to that. Excuse me. And fill in this first lesson that we learned from John the Baptist that I think is so important as we begin the new year.

And by the way, if you're going to the YouVersion Bible app, click on events, click on First Christian Church of Greensburg, and you can get to it that way. Because if we can seek to model this same heart that John has here, it's going to be incredible to see the growth and the change that Jesus does in each of us, no matter how old or young we are or how long we've been following him.

So here's the first thing I want you to see. A disciple has a heart of repentance. A disciple of Jesus has a heart of repentance. Repentance. Honestly, repentance is one of those kind of churchy words that we really don't use in everyday life much, but it really is a vital word that a lot of people misunderstand and we in the church need to fully understand.

[12 : 05] Repentance comes from a military world and it literally means about face or to turn 180 degrees. You could describe it this way.

It is a godly sorrow for sin as you turn away from that old lifestyle and you faithfully commit to follow Jesus for the rest of your days. In other words, it means you're all in.

Now, grab your Bibles again and let's start here in Mark 1, verse 4. It says, And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him confessing their sins. They were baptized by him in the Jordan River. I find it fascinating that this man, who was not in a fancy suit, but in rugged clothing, preaching a fiery judgment message, calling out hypocrites among them, and it says, key words here, the whole Judean countryside and all of Jerusalem were coming out to confess their sins and be baptized in the Jordan River.

What a cool sight with large crowds gathered around. What a beautiful picture of revival. And I find it fascinating that he called them into the wilderness to deal with their disobedience, just like God took the children of Israel on a journey in the wilderness to deal with theirs.

[13 : 42] Now, I hope you can see that he didn't get the name John the Baptist because he was just the first Baptist to ever exist. Instead, he was actually called John the Baptizer because he was calling people to repentance, baptizing them.

And let's just be honest. As we come here in 2023, and no need to raise your hand unless you just want to from wherever you are, but how many of us feel like we have a heart of stone right now? How many of us feel like Jonah running as far from God as possible and now we're sitting in the big fish struggling because we're reaping what we've sown? You know, I told you earlier that I was going to be a little more vulnerable with you today.

So here goes again. Just this past week, I was praying, and I said to the Lord, forgive me. I feel like I have a heart of stone right now because I've been trying to do life on my own.

God, forgive me for the bitterness and anger and the unkind words that have flown out of my mouth. Jesus, I need you desperately. I basically asked God to do what it says in Ezekiel 36, 26, when God says, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.

[14:56] I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. What a cool picture of repentance. Now let me ask you this. How many of you have ever attempted to chisel an ice sculpture?

Probably not many, right? Me neither. But I love to see incredible transformations that happen when these very talented artists start off with this giant block of ice and a vision, and as they go, they're working hard, chipping away until something like these awesome creations emerge.

And as I was doing a, and I know I can't like show you a picture over the radio, but as I was doing a Google search on this, I saw some amazing pictures of a giant elephant, a horse in a carriage, even a cool basketball scene with Kobe Bryant dunking the ball.

And I just marvel at the skill and just the beautiful finished product. And yet that's a pretty good picture of what God wants to do in us as he melts that heart and begins to chisel us more and more into his image so that we can walk in the freedom that only Christ offers.

So what does that even look like? What does that look like? Because we could do what many people in the crowd did that day where they kind of went through the motions of repentance and sorrow over their disobedience.

[16:24] We too can go down into the water and have everybody clap when we come out. And yet fast forwarding a few years, we know that some of the people who probably went out to be baptized by John were probably at Jesus' trial yelling, crucify him!

That's why it's more than just dunking someone in water. It's got to be a true heart change. It's true sorrow over our sin that put Jesus on that cross.

It's a desire that turns into a commitment to live for Jesus even when I don't feel like it or even when it's not popular. And in the case of a lot of Christians around the globe who are being persecuted for their faith, this true repentance could cost you everything.

And yet, because of his death on the cross, because of the tomb that continues to remain empty, with thankfulness in my heart, I say I'm all in.

And every day as I wake up and I roll to my feet, I can either say, oh, good Lord, it's morning, or I can say, good Lord, it is morning and I ask that you keep my heart tender and soft today no matter what junk I walk through.

[17:40] And when I fail, God, whether that's ugly words coming out of my mouth or running after the things of this world or just spiritual laziness, a lack of commitment to the bride of Christ, the church, or whatever it is, when I fail, I'm going to ask you, God, for forgiveness and strength.

I'll give you that sin and I'll seek to fill it with more of you, more of you, Jesus, every day in my life.

So, in 2023, if you want to walk in the ways of Jesus, start by having this heart that is tender, a heart of repentance every single day that seeks the heart of God.

Next, if you'll look back at your outline for me, a disciple has a heart of service, a heart of repentance, and then a heart of service. Grab your Bibles for me and let's pick back up here in Mark 1, 6.

And honestly, what seems at first glance like an odd sentence that just doesn't fit, that we just kind of pause in the story to share a few details of John's wardrobe and his diet.

But let me kind of explain these because they make perfect sense. Verse 6 of Mark 1 says, John wore clothing made of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist and he ate locusts and wild honey.

[18:58] Now, without understanding the context, I've heard people teach it this way. It seems like John was just kind of a different kind of guy and he wasn't about worldly things.

And sure, he was a godly type of different, but he wasn't as weird as we sometimes make this passage seem. And he focused on following the Lord with all his heart. But the reason Mark shares that he had on these hairy clothes and a leather belt around his waist is for another purpose.

Here's how Ronald F. Youngblood puts this. He says, the conviction that God was about to begin a new work among this unprepared people broke upon John with the force of a desert storm.

He was called, listen to this, to put on the prophet's hairy mantle with the resolve and the urgency of Elijah himself. Not only did he dress like Elijah in camel's hair and a leather belt, but he understood his ministry to be one of reform and preparation just as Elijah did.

See, this is what a prophet would wear in those days. And when John the Baptist put on the camel's hair and a rugged leather belt, he was declaring that God had set him apart even before birth to prepare the way for the Lord.

[20 : 14] And listen, that's exactly what he did. He was faithful even until the end where he was killed for preaching the truth. So, putting these clothes on and eating what you would have had to eat in the desert to sustain yourself was a testimony that he would serve the Lord exactly how God called him.

Now, when I look around our church, I realize that God has designed each of us differently with unique gifts and talents and abilities. And that's a good thing, honestly. Some of us have been gifted to preach and teach and that's great. Use it. Some of you have been gifted to sing and play instruments for the glory of God. Some of us, like me, have not. Some of us have gifts of hospitality or maybe you're a creative type or you're great with kids or youth or maybe you're great with attention to detail and administrative things. Maybe you have money management training and skills that can be a great resource to the church. Maybe you have tech abilities and you can help us with spreading the gospel in ways where that's going to meet the world, the technological ways.

[21 : 27] Maybe you're just a great people person and you can be a friendly face or a helpful hand as people come into the church. Maybe you just have a servant's heart and you're a great worker bee.

Here's how 1 Peter 4, 10 and 11 puts it and tells us what we need to do with our gifts. It says, each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.

If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. The very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength that God provides so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

To him be the glory and power forever and ever. Amen. So, however God has wired you, can I speak some strong words into your life right now? I'm just going to be bold and if your answer is no, just go ahead and turn off the radio for a minute, okay?

But if you have a repentant and servant's heart, listen to me, don't hoard your gifts. Don't just use your gifts when it's convenient like on a leap year on February the 29th, okay?

[22 : 39] That's giving God the leftovers. Look at John the Baptist's example and make that commitment that I'm going to have a servant's heart in 2023. I'm going to put serving Christ above all other agendas of this world.

And one thing we're really trying to steer our church towards is this idea that when we get the right people in the right seat on the bus using their gifts for the glory of God and they really do have those gifts and not just they want to have those gifts, that's when we see a healthy church make an eternal difference, starting our community and spreading to the ends of the earth.

A disciple of Jesus has a heart of repentance and a heart of service. And then last, let's talk about a heart of humility, a heart of humility.

Now pick back up with me here in Mark 1, verse 7. It says, and this was his message, talking about John the Baptist. After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.

I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit. Now, if you understand the first century Jewish culture, the lowest of servants were the ones who would stoop down and untie the sandals from their master's feet.

[24 : 08] Jewish servants wouldn't even consider it. It was the lowest of lowest of jobs in that society. And John kind of reverses the table and says, there's one coming whose sandals I am unworthy to untie.

Willing, but unworthy. And then we even fast forward to John 3.30 where Jesus is beginning his ministry. And it appears that the crowd coming to John is getting lighter and lighter.

And many of them have found their way over to Jesus. They're even getting baptized over there.

And that's when John's disciples come to him. And they seem like they're up in arms about it.

And you can tell that there's some pride and jealousy going on. And they're like, John, what are you going to do about this? But I love John the baptizer's heart. He once again makes it clear that Jesus is the Messiah.

And that his job was simply to prepare the way for Jesus, to point people to Jesus. And then he says this in John 3.30. And this is one of my life verses.

[25 : 11] Okay? He says, he, talking about Jesus, he must become greater, I must become less. There's your New Year's resolution right there. Jesus must become greater and greater and greater in my life and I must get out of the way and become less and less.

If you and I live this out, everything else is going to fall into place. When selfishness sneaks in, when pride tries to climb on the throne of my heart, when demanding my rights transposes from our culture into my life, Jesus must become greater and I must become less.

You know, a few years back on New Year's Day, in the Tournament of Roses Parade, a beautiful float suddenly sputtered and quit. Turns out, it was just out of gas.

The whole parade was held up until someone could get a can of gas out there. The amusing thing about this, the float was a standard oil company float.

With all their oil resources, its truck was out of gas. Now, I have a feeling there's a few people like me that may be listening to this message today that have recently felled out of gas.

[26 : 25] You're tired. You're exhausted. Maybe you've been hurt, but I want you to know, just like Steve preached last week, we have an eternal God who loves you and who's got the resources that you need.

Everything you need is found in Jesus. So here's what we do. We surrender everything we are to Him in repentance. We seek to follow John the Baptist's example and walk with that heart of repentance, that heart of servanthood, that heart of humility.

So let me leave you with these famous words from the hymn written by Helen Limmell years ago. It's called Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus. She wrote, Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and His grace. in 2023, may you and I be covered in the dust of our Savior. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, thank You so much for Your words of life that You've spoken over us today.

And I do pray that as we draw close to You, that You will just cover us with Your power and Your presence. God, that we will stop playing church, that we will stop just serving when it's convenient, when there's absolutely nothing else going on, and that we will come all in in our commitment to love You and to love Your church and to serve You and stay faithful until the day we take our last breath.

[28 : 02] God, You are so good. We worship You. We praise You. Jesus, we thank You for dying on the cross to set us free. We thank You that the tomb is empty and that we will walk with You in paradise someday, that death has been conquered.

We worship You, Jesus. Thank You so much for these words. I just pray that You will just drill them home in each of our lives and that we may look more like Jesus today than we did yesterday.

Lord, we love You. We give You praise and we pray these things in the name of Jesus, the name above all names. Amen and Amen. Hey, real quick, as we come into the new year, if God is just rocking your world, moving in your heart right now, we just want you to know that we would love to walk alongside you.

If you're ready to come like the passage we read today and get baptized and repent, this is the perfect time to say, Jesus, here's my life. You don't need to wait until tomorrow. You need to do it today and I would love for you to reach out to us.

We'll come alongside you. We'll get you baptized. We'll study the scriptures and we're just going to see God set you on His solid rock so that your life can be used for Him. My name is Ray Sweet.

[29 : 20] I'm the lead pastor at First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana. Why don't you reach out? You can email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com or you can call 812-663-8488.

Hey, God bless you and may you be covered in the dust of your Savior.