

Jesus First

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[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 know more about FCC, you can check us out at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, we're so thankful that you've tuned in today. We are excited to get into the Word, to let the Word get into us and let it transform these hearts. Now, I don't pretend to be a biology teacher. In fact, that was one class in high school and college that I was as happy to get through with a C, okay? However, I've always been fascinated by a part of the cell called DNA, deoxyribonucleic acid, another perfect display of God's power and creativity in creation.

And I like how Nemo's Kids Health put it very simply, where someone like me can understand what DNA is. They say DNA is the genetic information inside the body's cells that helps make people who they are.

It's the instructions for how to make the body like the code to a video game or blueprints for a house, only way more complex. But it's DNA that determines things like your hair, eye, and skin color, how tall you are, what your nose looks like, and so much more.

[1 : 20] In fact, it's my DNA that makes me the rarest combination of hair and eye color in the world. Red hair and blue eyes make up 0.17% of the population on Earth.

That's less than one-fifth of 1% of people have red hair and blue eyes. I guess you could say I'm rare, special, weird. You choose your own adjectives.

Some already have. But listen, DNA, to put it very basic, is who you are. And you know what? Each specific church family has its own unique spiritual DNA based on our history as a church, who God has brought into the church family, the heart of the leadership, and most importantly, where the Holy Spirit is leading.

So for the next couple of months, I'm excited to preach this series where we're going to talk through our DNA at FCC, our new vision, mission, and values as a church that are all based right off the Word of God and the Holy Spirit's leading over this family of believers.

See, I'm thankful for the privilege to work alongside fellow elders here at the church who truly love Jesus and want to live out His purpose. And for the last year or so, we've been working with this group called E2.

[2 : 39] That means Effective Elders. And this is a group of faithful ministers of the gospel who have a passion to come alongside the local church to help us get biblically healthy and make an impact in our community and beyond.

And this last fall, they came alongside us to help us as a leadership go through the process of refreshing our vision, mission, and values.

The why, the how, and the what that makes up our spiritual DNA here at FCC. And we want to share this with you over the next couple months with a special unveiling of our new church logo on the last Sunday of the series, March the 2nd.

But let's start today with the why, the vision. Because you can't truly fulfill your mission unless you're passionate about the why. Unless you know why you do what it is you do.

And here's our why. Jesus first. Because at first Christian church, we want to put Jesus first in everything.

[3 : 45] And what I love about this church family that was started in 1832, 193 years ago, is that we were founded on this idea, think about it, of Jesus first.

See, we're not a part of any denomination because we have no governing hierarchy outside of this church family led by our own spiritual leaders called elders. No one from the outside tells us where to send our missions money, who to hire, who to fire, what to believe, or anything else.

However, we are a part of what we call a brotherhood of churches called the Christian church, Churches of Christ. This was simply a group of Bible-believing followers of Jesus in the early 1800s who got fed up with man-made doctrines, creeds, and traditions telling them what to believe. And they finally said, enough. We're going back to the Bible for everything. And some of our founding statements in our movement say this. Where the Bible speaks, we speak. Where the Bible is silent, we are silent. In essentials, unity. In opinions, liberty. But in all things, love. We are not the only Christians, but we are Christians only.

[4 : 57] And then no creed but Christ. In other words, Jesus first. Before what I think or I want to believe, Jesus and his word.

Before my traditions, as special as they may be to me, Jesus. Before this is what I believe, because if it was good enough for Grandma, it's good enough for me. Before that, Jesus.

Before this is what we've always done, Jesus. Instead of catering to those with money or influence, Jesus. And I know that may kind of come across a little strong, but I'm telling you, in everything, if Jesus is first, it makes all the difference.

And you know what? That sounds a lot like God's word, doesn't it? In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 6, 33, Jesus actually said, but seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

He will take care of your needs. You don't have to worry about what tomorrow holds. Everything falls into place when Jesus is truly in first place in our lives and in our churches.

[6 : 07] And if we're honest, many times when things start going haywire, it's because Jesus wasn't really first. Okay? I've been guilty of this way too many times in my life.

Now, let me give you an example that was a valuable life lesson for me. When we were in our previous ministry in Tennessee, we were trying to hire a worship pastor.

And to be honest, we were struggling in this area. And that's when we got a resume that appeared, you could say, too good to be true. We went through the process.

And I'll tell you, this guy was talented, far above any others applying. Great singer, fantastic musician. But there were just some red flags about personality and maybe even character.

Came across kind of like a used car salesman. No offense to car salesmen. But he just kept changing things. And we were catching little contradictions in his story.

[7 : 04] And all of this was God trying to show us, Hey, guys, I know he's very talented, but this isn't a good hire. I mean, it was red flag after red flag. But instead of Jesus first, we chose convenience over being patient.

We chose talent over godly character. We chose to hire him. And within one month after he came, so just like three or four Sundays, he came in a little more charismatic than the church was used to. He even kicked the piano player off the team. And when I made him bring her back on, the next thing I know, I'm on a date with my wife. I mean, it is Valentine's Day. And he calls and just abruptly quits.

And we as an eldership had to look in the mirror and say, Okay, our hearts were to honor Christ. No question. But we didn't put Jesus first in this process. We didn't truly listen to the Holy Spirit's leading.

And now, look, it's a mess. Boy, am I thankful for his grace and mercies that are new in my life every day. But it was a valuable life lesson learned for me.

[8 : 07] So today, let's look at what it means to put Jesus first in our own personal lives and in the church. And last week, as I began praying and thinking through this on a much deeper level, I couldn't help but to ask this question.

What did Jesus make first? What was first to Jesus? I mean, what did he prioritize in his ministry here on this earth? And as I studied that, there are quite a few things that you could probably list here.

But to me, three things quickly jumped off the pages of Scripture that must be our passion as well. So let's start here. Jesus first means prioritizing truth.

Making truth, making God's word our priority over popular opinion or what fits the way that I want to live or I want to think. We'll dig deeper into this when we get to our values, but let's dwell here today for just a few minutes, okay?

In John 8, 31 and 32, the word says this, To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you

free.

[9 : 16] You know, 2025 marks 19 years that God has held me up in full-time ministry. And I can't tell you how many times I've seen people come into the church who believed way too many lies about themselves.

I've also been blessed to see some of those people get into the word and discover their identity in Christ. And it changed everything. They came to this powerful realization that, hey, I'm a son or a daughter of the king.

That you are fully known and loved by the creator. That he calls you by name. That he has plans and a future for you. That he's made you righteous as you are no longer a slave to sin.

In fact, he calls you a masterpiece. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. You are chosen and blameless before God. He will strengthen and protect you against the enemy.

You are one with other believers as God lavishes his love, calling us children. And listen, we can keep going. He calls you friend, new creation, a living stone. He says you're more than conquerors through Christ Jesus your Lord.

[10 : 23] That you are victorious and you are a child of light. It's amazing what happens when the word of God that always carries the power of God grabs a hold of your heart and mine and changes us by the blood of the Lamb.

And when we say Jesus first at FCC, we're saying that his word is absolute truth. And even when it seems like foolishness to the world, we walk in the truth.

We'll proclaim it. We'll stand on it. We'll memorize it. And we will let it shape our minds, creating this biblical lens by which we see our world. And if you've seen any of the studies that have been done in the last 10 or 15 years, you know what?

You've probably just seen this with your own eyes. It's amazing the difference between churches that cave in to cultural teachings to water down the truth versus those churches who lovingly preach truth in context, who do not back down.

Those that are trying so hard to be relevant and please people, they're the ones who usually are struggling to keep their doors open. While those preaching truth unashamedly in love are usually the ones growing leaps and bounds.

[11 : 34] God cannot bless churches that stray from the truth. And yet he floods his blessings over those who stay faithful. And we've seen this here at our church.

We've taken a stand on the word of God over the last 20 plus years since walking away from the disciples of Christ, which is now a denomination, so that we could faithfully put Jesus first.

And would anyone here deny that God has done an incredible work? Lives transformed. Family trees changed. Souls saved. Chains of addiction broken.

Marriages restored. Missionaries sent. Pews full. All because of the power of God when truth is proclaimed. And I can tell you for myself, the staff, and our elders here that this will not change while we have been entrusted to lead this church family.

Because the word has set each of us free. See, Jesus first means prioritizing truth. Second, Jesus first means pursuing the lost.

[12 : 36] Now, I love the story of Zacchaeus. You probably know that song about the wee little man and he climbs up in the tree to get a glimpse of Jesus. And among all the people gathered around him, Jesus sees one of the most notorious sinners in the crowd.

And he calls him out of the tree saying that he's going to eat at his house. And as Jesus pursues his heart, we see this incredible change in Zacchaeus where he obviously has repented.

He promises to give half of his wealth to the poor, even to pay back anyone he wronged as a tax collector, four times more than he cheated them. What we're seeing is the fruit of salvation.

And then in Luke 19, 9 and 10, Jesus said to him, Today salvation has come to this house because this man too is a son of Abraham. For the son of man came to seek and save the lost.

As we look through scripture, I love that Jesus is constantly ticking off the self-righteous Pharisees by spending time with those considered the worst of society. People they look down upon.

[13 : 42] People they would have nothing to do with. And in Mark chapter 2, we see a perfect example of this where Jesus called Matthew, another tax collector known for being corrupt.

And Jesus calls him to be one of his disciples. And then he goes over to have a meal with him and his sinner friends. Notice he didn't compromise. He didn't lower the standards of holiness, but he calls him to a higher standard of righteousness.

And that's when Mark 2, 16 and 17 puts it like this. When the teachers of the law, who were Pharisees, saw Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples, Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?

On hearing this, Jesus said to them, It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners. Jesus loved us so much as he saw us in our mess.

As the word teaches, every one of us have sinned. We've all fallen short of the glory of God. We've missed the mark. We've made mistakes. And therefore, we are separated from a perfect and holy God for all eternity.

[14 : 52] Read the book of Romans. It's all throughout it. We can't be good enough. We can't serve enough. We can't give enough. We can't do enough good deeds. It's only by the grace of God through faith in Jesus.

And I love how Oswald Chambers put this. The heart of salvation is the cross of Christ. The reason salvation is so easy to obtain is that it costs God so much.

The cross was the place. Now listen to this. This is powerful. The cross was the place where God and sinful man merged with a tremendous collision and where the way to life was opened.

But all the cost and pain of the collision was absorbed by the heart of God. Jesus took our place. He took the suffering we deserve and said, I love you big time.

But listen, he won't make you. If grace is a gift, which it absolutely is, he won't make you unwrap and open that gift. He won't force you to be covered in grace.

[15 : 53] He gives us the free will to respond by faith to the most amazing invitation of forgiveness and life eternal. The gift of freedom and purpose in Christ. That's why the Bible is so clear that we must repent.

We must turn away from our sins and surrender everything to him being baptized into Christ. That's why we worship him with every ounce of who we are. That's why we serve him faithfully even when it comes at a cost.

That's why we share hope with others who are stuck in the same pit where we used to live. And because seeking and saving the lost was Jesus's priority, we at FCC are passionate about introducing the lost to him.

Of course, let me be clear. We're just the ones who plant and water the seed. It's the Lord who makes it grow. It's him who does the awesome work. But when you come to a worship service or you come to a Bible study connected with our church, you're going to hear about the grace of God that he wants to lavish all over your life.

And I'm thankful as we look back at the last three years here at FCC, we've been blessed to see around 125 people surrender their hearts to Christ, being baptized into him.

[17 : 05] Just last week, the first Sunday of the year, we saw two of our youth make the decision to follow Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

And here's the cool thing. You are a traveling missionary wherever you go. You ever thought about it that way? Wherever you go, you're a traveling missionary. When you go to work or to the grocery store, you have a chance to share your story of what Jesus has done in your life.

When you're pumping gas or on vacation, you have the privilege to proclaim the goodness of God. When you're celebrating big life moments that life is just great, or even trusting God through the pain when life stinks, you can still tell of his wonders and mercy.

To put Jesus first means that the lost matter to us because they matter to him. And church, how could we not care about the lost when that's what we used to be?

And then the last thing I want to emphasize today is this. Jesus first means preaching holiness.

Now, I know that word preaching carries some strong connotations, but I want to be strong with this.

[18 : 16] Jesus first means preaching holiness. How many of you have ever seen the movie The Guardian? Kevin Costner, Ashton Kutcher. Hard to believe it's already 19 years old, but a good movie about the life of some rescue swimmers in the Coast Guard.

And one big thing that these rescue swimmers pride themselves on is their number. The number of people that they've saved on all the missions they've gone on.

Well, Kevin Costner, who plays the main character, he's one of the most well-decorated rescue swimmers in the history of the Coast Guards. And Ashton Kutcher, who may be the most talented and up-and-coming young rescue swimmer, he wants to know Kevin Costner's number.

How many people have you saved? And I think down deep it's because he wants to beat it. And that's when this older, wiser man looks at him and he says, you want to know my number? It's 22. And he looks at him really strange like, uh, 22? That's it? I mean, he's expecting to hear in the hundreds, maybe more, I don't know. And Costner goes on to explain to him, listen, I never kept track of the number of people I saved, but I kept track of the people that were lost.

[19 : 30] 22 people were lost when I was attempting to save them. That's what he remembered. And you know what? It is an absolute blessing to baptize people into Christ.

I've been blessed to baptize so many from children as young as probably six or seven, all the way up to a lady in her mid-90s. But kind of like this movie that I just shared with you, what sticks in my head is not the number of baptisms that I've been able to do as people are surrendering their life to Christ, but what sticks in my head are those I baptized that quickly abandoned the faith and walked away.

Those who didn't bear the fruit of their salvation, who faded away from the church going back to that old lifestyle, those who I perceive, I'm not God and I don't pretend to be, but those who I perceive thought that maybe they could trick God and just attain their get out of hell free card.

But that's not the way that it works. See, those are the faces that I have in my mind. Not that you're going to be perfect after baptism, but when the Holy Spirit truly comes into you and resides in you, man, there's change, there's transformation.

And while I am not the judge, thank God, my heart cries out for people to experience more than just religion or getting dunked in water or praying a prayer or whatever, to experience what it's like to daily walk with the God of the universe being changed into the image of Christ more and more every day.

[20 : 57] Whenever you see someone respond to an invitation and come forward on a Sunday morning, one of us on staff always sits down with them through the week and talks through this most important decision they'll ever make.

And after talking through the plan of salvation, we get to the last page of this packet. And listen, the packet is just scripture, okay? And it simply reads, Now I am a Christian by the grace of God. Now what? And then it says, Be faithful to Jesus until the day you die. And I always take them to a passage from Colossians 2, 6 and 7.

And it says, So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue. So just as passionately as you came running to Jesus, it says continue to live your lives in Him.

Rooted. Keep that word in your mind. Rooted and build up in Him. Strengthened in the faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness. Really cool word picture here.

[21 : 54] Being rooted and built up in Christ. See, when you first plant a tree, those roots aren't very deep and they're not very wide, are they? A big storm could easily knock over a tree that's just been planted.

And the same thing's true when you surrender your life to Christ and you get baptized into Him. That's not the end. That's the beginning of your journey. You're newly planted. And now it's time to put your roots down deeper, growing more and more like Jesus as the days and the years go by. Daily getting into His Word. Growing through encouragement and accountability of being an active part of the family of God, the church. Seeking the Lord's heart in prayer. Following the Holy Spirit's leading.

Serving Him alongside others. Other believers. Putting yourself in places and around people that can help you grow. Staying away from places you don't need to go. See, making Jesus first means preaching holiness with my life as I flourish more and more looking like Jesus.

And to quote Oswald Chambers once again, sanctification is not my idea of what I want God to do for me. Sanctification is God's idea of what He wants to do in me.

[23 : 07] To bring this home, our why at FCC, our vision is Jesus first. We want Jesus to be first in everything.

We want to proclaim Him. Make Jesus first in this world. In my life, in my marriage, with my kids, with my family, at work, in my hobbies, when others are around, when I'm by myself.

And when it comes to this body of believers, Jesus first means His will, His ways, His word are first in everything we do. No politics.

No favoritism. Jesus and His agenda first. And because truth mattered to Him, because the lost are precious in His sight, and because preaching holiness is vital, we will make those things a priority.

Let me leave you with this scripture that you may know by heart, but please don't let the familiarity of this scripture stop you from truly digging deep and understanding these words.

[24 : 10] Proverbs 3, 5, and 6. Trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, submit to Him. Now let me stop there.

What does that sound like? All of that basically says, Jesus first. And then what? What happens after that? When you trust in the Lord with all your heart, lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight. Church, it is amazing what God can do in our lives when He's really, truly on the throne of our hearts.

When Jesus is first. Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we are so very grateful for the Word of God.

We are thankful for 2025, this new year. We're even thankful for the snow that we've been getting. It's absolutely beautiful. We continue to pray for your safety.

[25 : 12] But Father, I just pray as we have started this new series where we are unveiling our vision and our mission and our core values, that you will help us as a church to always stay on track, to never give in to public opinion or man's wishes, but to follow you wherever you lead us as a church family.

We pray that you will help us to stay faithful. And God, when we do fall short, that we all do, that you will just pull us back and help us to stay on the straight and narrow. Father, I pray that just like we talked about today, that the Word of God will be powerful in the life of each person listening to this message.

I pray that we will have a heart for the lost to share with them the hope that we have discovered in Christ. And I pray that we will not just get baptized and come out of the water and stay the same, but we will allow you through your Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and our minds into the image of Christ, that we will daily discipline ourselves and pursue your heart as we grow more and more into your image, Jesus.

So Father, have your way in us in 2025. Help us to be who you have called us to be.

Help us to trust you every single step of the way. And we just thank you for your amazing love and grace that you have shown by the cross of Jesus Christ.

[26 : 47] We are thankful for the cross. We are so grateful for the empty tomb. And we are thankful for the life we have on this earth and the life that you offer us in eternity if our faith is in Jesus Christ.

We love you and we pray all these things in his precious name, in the name above all names, in the name of Jesus. And God's people said, Amen and Amen.

Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today to this message. We just pray that God has used it in your life. Hey, here's the thing. If you have maybe some questions about the church, questions about faith, maybe you want to talk about giving your life to Jesus.

We at First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana, once again, my name is Ray Sweet. I'm the lead pastor. We would love to come alongside you and just help you on this journey just like others have done for us.

Here's a couple ways you can reach out to us here at First Christian Church, Greensburg. You can reach out by calling us at 812-663-8488, 663-8488, or you can go ahead and email me at ray at fccgreensburg.com.

[27 : 59] Hey, God bless you. We pray that you have an incredible week.