

Back to the Future

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Preacher: Ray Sweet

[0:00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana.! We're thankful that you've tuned in to the preaching of God's Word today.

If you'd like to learn a little more about us as a church, you can go to FCCgreensburg.com or you can check out the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, today we are excited to get into the Word, but most importantly, one last Sunday here of the year, let the Word get into these hearts. The message today is called Back to the Future.

We're in a series called Word Alive. This is the sixth and final week, and we'll start here in John 1, verse 15. Now, there was an iconic movie that came out in 1985. I was just a two-year-old at the time, but it became the highest-grossing movie that year called Back to the Future.

How many of you remember when that movie actually came out? And even the fact that most people have at least heard of it 40 years later shows the success of this film.

[1:06] Set in 1985, it features a young Michael J. Fox playing Marty McFly as a teenager sent back to 1955 in a time-traveling DeLorean built by his eccentric scientist friend Doc Brown.

And he accidentally prevents his parents from falling in love, threatening his own existence, so he has to reconcile them and then get back to the future.

And I think one of the reasons this movie caught people's attention was the catchy title, because it really is brilliant. Back to the Future. Kind of an ironic statement that seems contradictory in some ways.

Why would you go back to go to the future? Wouldn't you just charge ahead? Don't you just keep your eyes forward? And yet, I want to show you today that there's some wisdom in that statement as we come to the last week of our Christmas series called Word Alive.

If you want to follow along in your Bible or the holy glow of your phone, go to John 1 with me. We're going to break down our passage today in a very unique way as we dig in and better understand exactly what God's Word teaches us in context.

[2:21] But we're also going to allow this passage to help us look back at this year and then head towards the future of 2026 that's just four days away.

Isn't that crazy to say? Four days until 2026. Now, speaking of loco, some of you may have been surprised by the Christmas decoration. If you've been to the church here that are still up right now.

And we wanted to start way too early putting them up, if you remember, like on November the 9th. And here we are in December 28th finishing up our Christmas series.

So thank you for allowing us to just have some fun with this. But let's give a quick recap of where we've been so far over the first half of John chapter 1 as we close out today.

We've discovered that John wrote this book by the power of the Holy Spirit. So that you and I may truly believe that Jesus is the Messiah. And by believing, we can truly have life in his name.

[3 : 19] So right away, John drops this bombshell to Jews and to Greeks alike. Jesus is the Word. He's God. He is the Eternal Creator.

He's a part of the Triune Godhead. Father, Son, Holy Spirit. He is Zoe Life. He is light. And we learn that we can walk in that light, shining brightly wherever we go.

And even as the darkness tries to prevail, the light of Christ breaks through, bringing hope to all who would receive him, to all who would believe in his name. And now let's go ahead.

You should be in the Gospel of John with me. Chapter 1. And let's start in verse 15. Here's what the Word of God says. John testified concerning him.

That's Jesus. John cried out, saying, This is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

[4 : 22] Out of his fullness we have received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

So, we start off with a powerful reminder that we've seen all throughout John 1 so far. And you can fill this in.

And don't forget, you can always go to the YouVersion Bible app. Free download. It's incredible. YouVersion Bible app. You can go under events, under First Christian Church of Greensburg, Indiana.

And then you can see our outline. And here's the first part of it. I just want to give you one sentence today. Here's the first half of it. Jesus is the eternal God. Jesus is the eternal God.

I know a lot of you know this, but for those who might not, when you read through the Bible, say the New Testament, and a certain message is being repeated over and over, often in slightly different ways, that was the first century equivalent to hitting bold on the computer if it's something important.

[5 : 39] That was their way of highlighting a key point in yellow, okay? They would repeat it. And we've seen this truth repeated all throughout these first 18 verses.

And the whole book of John, honestly, for that matter. But Jesus is the eternal God. He's the creator of everything. And once again, we're reminded of John the Baptizer's words in verse 15 when he boldly proclaimed, this is the one I spoke about when I said, he who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.

Kind of sounds like a riddle, doesn't it? And when you first read this, it doesn't make sense because John was six months older than Jesus. His ministry started before Jesus's did.

In no earthly way did Jesus come before him unless, insert truth, he's God. Because while John may have physically been born into this world before Jesus, Jesus always was.

He existed eternally before time and space. He created everything we see and even what we can't see out of nothing and said it was good.

[6 : 52] He created man in his own image and said it was very good. So as we close out this series today, I want to make sure your picture of Jesus is accurate because it determines how you live.

It determines your eternity. And one thing those closest to me know is that I have this big pet peeve where I'm not a fan of portraits of Jesus, especially that paint him as someone of European appearance with light brown hair, blue eyes, and pale skin.

Listen, I'm very European, mostly German and English, but Jesus was not. He was a Jewish man. And while this is my pet peeve that I'm probably a little over the top on, I promise you I won't criticize your velvet Jesus picture if I come to visit you.

I just, I'm not going to have one, okay? But more important than a silly pet peeve is the portrait that you and I have of who Jesus is in our mind.

What are his attributes? And regardless of what some cults teach as they manipulate the scriptures, John is crystal clear that Jesus is God. So as we look back at 2025 and then even forward to what God wants to do in us next year, before we get personal, let's think about this question for our church family.

[8 : 14] I just want to celebrate so many good things with you on this last Sunday of the year. There are different metrics that healthy churches use that helped us to see how well things are going.

Each metric is important, but it doesn't tell the whole story. But if you combine several different metrics, you can get a pretty decent look at the big picture. Well, one metric is how many people are studying God's word through a family group, through a Sunday school class, Wednesday elevate classes, men's and women ministry, 220 youth and kids ministry gatherings, even how many people are getting connected to other believers where they have that support system.

So how are we doing in going deeper in discipleship? And I'll tell you, we've seen more kids, youth and adults putting their roots deeper and wider in their relationship with Christ as they dig into scripture.

Another metric is attendance, because each person is a soul that we care about being in eternity. So when people tell you attendance doesn't matter at a church, they're wrong.

But it's also not the only thing that matters. See, church, we've seen our attendance increase 90 people on a Sunday from the average in 2024.

[9 : 35] And that increased from 2023. See, praise God for that. We're out of room, but praise God, because that's a good problem to have. Moving the 930 and the 11 o'clock services to the Family Life Center happened because of this.

And I get it. There are growing pains, but souls are worth more than what I want and what I think. Another metric are the baptisms of those who don't know Jesus and the placed memberships by those who do.

And we saw that increase about 35 to 40 percent from last year as those are lives now fully committed to Christ and his church.

Names written in the Lamb's Book of Life. You could even look at metrics like the increase in overall giving and to missions or the upsurge in our giveaway Sunday giving and the ability to help more people see the love of Jesus.

Church, as we look back and we ask the question, did we allow God to be God in our church? I can say that I am immensely proud of our leadership and our church family.

[10 : 42] Now, are we perfect? No. Do we have things to work on as a church? Absolutely. But we're growing. And when I think of even how attitudes have changed here since the summer of 2018, man, I'm so proud of you guys.

I'm so proud of your lifestyle of Jesus first as we intentionally die to self and say, more of Jesus, less of me.

More of Jesus, less of me. Now, as we look forward to 2026 as a church, how can we let Jesus be God more in this family, this body of believers?

I can tell you that we have a team of around 20 people made up of staff, elders, and key leaders in the church who have been working hard to examine the good, the bad, and the ugly, asking what improvements need to happen for this church to continue to grow more and even be biblically healthier.

And looking ahead a few months, starting the week after Easter on April the 12th, we will be launching a four-week sermon series sharing a brand new three-year strategic plan all by the power and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

[11:56] We'll answer questions like, well, how can we do a better job of evangelizing the lost? What can we improve to better disciple our church family to look more like Jesus?

How can we help our next gen fall in love with Jesus as we raise up more generations of bold, sold-out, loving, and truth-focused believers to lead the church forward?

We'll also be tackling other barriers to being a healthy church that continues to grow for the glory of God. And if you remember what Pastor Gary Johnson taught us in May of this last year, he said, healthy things always grow.

Now, let's look inward and let's ask these two same questions. First, did I allow Jesus to be the God of my life? So I'm not looking at my neighbor here. I'm not looking at my wife, my kids.

I'm looking at me. You're looking at you. Did you allow Jesus to be the God of your life in 2025? And I can't answer that for you. You can't answer it for me. But I do know from messing up a lot in this area that control is the enemy of truly trusting God.

[13:07] And I know I'm not the only one who struggles with trying to take back control of my life instead of letting the Holy Spirit lead. And I like how David Edwards said this. The more we try to gather the control of our lives, the more everything falls apart.

God did not create us to control. He created us to live in agreement, to trust Him. So if you got your outline or your journal in front of you, how was 2025?

2025? How did God show up? How did He reveal Himself to you through His Word and through the love of the body of Christ around you? We even ask this question.

Did I allow Him to be the awesome God He wants to be in my life in 2025? Celebrate the good. See how far you've come. But write down the struggles too because those can become goals in your life in 2026.

God, I want to get out of the way. I want to let you change me more into your image. Now, do you remember what John the Baptizer said in John 3.30 when men were elevating Him and trying to put Him and Jesus on the same level, maybe even put Him above Jesus?

[14:16] He actually said, Jesus must become greater. I must become less. I even like how the Apostle Paul addresses this with a dysfunctional church in 1 Corinthians 3 that honestly looks too much like the American church today.

He said, starting in verse 4, for when one says, I follow Paul and another, I follow Apollos, are you not mere human beings? What after all is Apollos?

And what is Paul? Only servants through whom you came to believe as the Lord has assigned to each His task. Then Paul says, I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been the one making it grow.

So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow. You know, there's nothing wrong with showing appreciation and respect to those who pour into you because enough church people often don't do that.

But this church can never be built around a personality like a preacher, like a pastor, like an elder. And just like Paul and Apollos, we just want to be servants used by Jesus so that He becomes greater and greater in your life.

[15:29] And selfishness and pride become crucified in your life. And I know as I read this last week, you know, you probably already heard this recently, but I just want you to let it sink in again.

Galatians 2:20 It says, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Now, how can we let God be the awesome, eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, majestic, gracious, loving God He wants to be in each of our lives next year, 2026?

Well, take some time. Take some time this week and pray about that. Let the Lord show you how He can become greater in your life next year. And then let's finish this sentence right here.

Jesus is the eternal God. Now we'll add to it, full of grace and truth. So, thinking about these two attributes of Jesus, grace and truth, I've discovered that most people usually lean one of those two ways, although we all have some of both.

[16:41] So, you have the grace people who are usually very sweet and very kind, quick to show forgiveness, and that's wonderful. Yet, they often struggle to stand up in boldness and truth when it's needed, oftentimes sweep things under the rug, just letting it go, or even burying it deep inside.

Then you have the truth people who have no struggle with boldness in speaking truth into people and situations. And that's wonderful too. Yet, sometimes they forget about the grace they've received as they can come across hurtful whether they intend to or not.

How many of you, let me ask you this, and I know I can't see you right now, so you're just going to have to think about it in your head. But how many of you fall more, when you think about the grace and truth side, how many of you fall more, lean more on the grace side?

Okay, and how many of you are more on the truth side? Now, have you ever noticed that grace people are often married to truth people? Because both are so important and we can balance each other out.

I think me and my wife do that well. She's clearly the grace person in our family. She's sweet. She's reasonable. She's always full of grace and compassion, putting herself in other people's shoes really well.

[17:58] And I'm always over here so black and white on truth and even ready to help God with the judgment side, which, by the way, doesn't need my help at all. And yet, I need her to soften me up sometimes and she needs me to help her stand bold.

And we're convinced after 18 years of marriage, we really balance each other out well. While also, I probably drive her nuts. But here's another thing I love about Jesus.

He's the perfect balance of grace and truth. Now, let's read John 1, 16 and 17 one more time as we break this down. It says, Out of his fullness, we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. Christ. So, those who have truly believed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, who remember, that word believe means more than just, sure, why not?

Or, yeah, I grew up in the church. No, that's not what it means. If you study the book of John, it means all of me taking all of Jesus according to all of God's word, living all for him.

[19:07] So, as imperfectly as you and I will do that, so believers, we receive the fullness of blessing in Christ that this world cannot understand.

And I love the next phrase, and this is from the NIV, grace in place of grace already given. Or as some other good translations simply say, they kind of simplify that, they say grace upon grace.

And I don't know about you, but the more I follow Jesus, the more I realize I need him, the more I grasp that he's God and I'm not, the more I see my imperfections in the light of his perfection.

So I can relate to this. Maybe you can too. I need that grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. That unmerited favor that Jesus gave by living a sinless life as he went to the cross to take the punishment I deserve.

And then on that third day, the stone couldn't hold him any longer. And he rose from the grave conquering death, offering that Zoë life to all who would pick up their cross and follow him, to all who would believe.

[20:17] And here's the best part. That grace that saves us keeps on sustaining and strengthening our faith as we grow up in spiritual maturity more every year. We have a God of grace and I'm so thankful for that.

But he's also a God of truth at the same time. And his grace and his truth do not contradict. They do not battle for attention. They work hand in hand because you can't have grace without truth.

And I like how John MacArthur, a Bible scholar, put it. He said, Scripture teaches that salvation is holy by believing God's truth in the gospel by which one receives his saving grace.

You know, I remember as a newer Christian, someone gave me a burnt CD. Do you remember those? Kids today would be like, what are you talking about? But a burnt CD that had several worship songs by different artists.

And I don't even remember what song this led into. But it was kind of like a, it was a live setting, concert-like setting. And before they sang the song, the worship leader very passionately quoted Psalm 97, 1 through 6.

[21:24] And it was so influential. I listened to it so many times, but it taught me that my God's not a wimp, that he is powerful beyond anything I can comprehend.

And it even helped me to memorize it because I listened to it so often and even had the music there. So here's what it says. Psalm 97, The Lord reigns.

Let the earth be glad. Let the distant shores rejoice. Clouds and thick darkness surround him. Righteousness and justice are the foundations of his throne. Fire goes before him and consumes his foes on every side.

His lightning lights up the world. The earth sees and trembles. The mountains melt like wax before the Lord. Before the Lord of all the earth, the heavens proclaim his righteousness and all peoples will see his glory.

And I don't know if you caught those two words, righteousness and justice, but they're often used when we talk about God's truth. He is righteous. He is full of justice. His truth is the standard we live by.

[22:28] He's the only one worthy to decide truth. And where do we find that? In God's word. See, 2 Timothy 3, starting in verse 16, says all scripture, not some, not just the parts we like, all scripture is God breathed.

And it's useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Why? So that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

So let me ask you, when it comes to our God who's full of grace and truth, how did you do with grace and truth this year? Did you embrace the grace God has given you, realizing if you're in Christ, the old is gone and the new is here?

Did you walk in that freedom and that peace? Or, did we continue to let shame and guilt from our past keep us in a very unhealthy place?

And we could also ask, because you have received grace upon grace, how have you done in showing others that same grace? Do people around you benefit from the grace you've received?

[23 : 36] Or, shifting gears a little bit, are you allowing your moral compass to be defined by God God's truth? Are you allowing your worldview to be fully shaped by God's truth?

Or, do politics and your personal lifestyle determine your beliefs more than the Word of God? So, I know the Word says this, but I'm going to live this because this is what I want, right? And then, how can we walk in grace and truth better next year?

Let me be honest about some of my struggles for a second. I have the tendency to jump to conclusions too quickly. I know I can do better in this area showing grace to others because I am far from perfect myself.

And then, when it comes to the truth side, I'm constantly in the Word preparing for messages, which is an absolute blessing. It does benefit me in great ways, but I can be more diligent getting into the Word for personal growth.

Next year can be better. I want to memorize more Scripture. I want to sit at Jesus' feet more through the Word and through prayer. I want to know Him better. And I want that grace and that truth to permeate my life even more, shining Jesus into the darkness.

[24 : 47] So, as we come to a close here in this series, let me encourage you as we've gone back to the future today, if you're alive and kicking, even if you're just breathing, okay, God's not done with you yet.

And we just spent seven messages understanding who Jesus is and who He wants to be in our lives. So today, we look forward with joy because if we're in Christ, we have the ultimate hope on this earth and even better in eternity.

So do me a favor. Take some time this week. Pray. Jot some things down. And church, let's get out of the way and let's let our God be God full of grace and truth in 2026.

If you're on board with that, even from home or in your car, wherever you are, will you give me a bold amen? Amen and amen. Pray with me. Heavenly Father, we just worship and adore you.

Thank you for just the privilege to sit under the teaching of your word and to study and to learn that Jesus, you're not just a good guy or a prophet or a good moral teacher, but you're God.

[26 : 06] You are creator. You are eternal. You are part of the Godhead three in one. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, you are life. You are light. And our only hope for this life is when we put our trust completely, wholly, surrendered in you and you alone.

So, thank you, Jesus, for revealing this to us through your word, all throughout your word. And I just pray that anyone listening today can know the truth and the hope that you give through Jesus Christ.

That, Father, if there's anyone who doesn't know your hope, that today can be a day where they surrender all to your Lordship and they walk in your grace, your forgiveness, your transformation.

salvation. So, thank you again for opening up your word to us. May this word get into these hearts and change us. We pray all this in Jesus' holy and precious name. And God's people said, amen and amen.

Hey, real quick, once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church, Greensburg, Indiana. And if you have any questions about church, about your faith, about following Jesus, here's a couple ways that you can reach out.

[27:25] You can call us at 812-663-8488. That's 812-663-8488. Or, you can email me at rayatfccgreensburg.com.

Hey, God bless you. I hope you have a great last few days of 2025. And I truly believe the best is yet to come when Jesus is truly the Lord of our lives.

God bless you and have a fantastic week.