

## **The Christian Faith In a Nutshell**

A message for Trinity Evangelical Free Church

Sunday, May 26, 2019

### **Introduction**

Every now and then I run into an expression that's helpful, but mysterious. One of those expressions is "in a nutshell". When somebody says this, we all get the general idea, but what exactly does it mean? And more, where did that phrase come from?

The phrase means "to summarize" or, "to take a long, complex topic, and say it in a few words". We're good so far. Now, where did the phrase come from? It comes from an ancient Roman historian. One day, he saw a copy of a major book that was so small, he said you could put it into a nutshell. His creative description earned a place in the history of language.

Every now and then, someone who doesn't know anything about the Christian faith asks me to summarize it in a few minutes. Could you do that if someone asked you? Lots of people have tried, and today I'd like to give it a shot.

You can explain the Christian faith in a few words, in a nutshell, with two major points, and several sub-points. The two major points talk about time: Past and Future.

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### **Summary**

#### **I. Past**

God created the world and humans. He invited humans to participate in a fantastic adventure with him. You say, "sometimes life doesn't feel like a fantastic adventure". That's because something got broken. God took it upon himself to fix it through Jesus Christ.

#### **II. Future**

He now invites us back to the original plan, to participate in a fantastic adventure with him.

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That's it! So, what are the sub-points? Let's find out. A note: The points all start with the letter "R".

#### **I. Past**

**Revelation: *God reveals himself to us.***

First, God creates the world and humans. All you must do to learn about this part is look at the opening pages of the Bible. ***There, God reveals himself to us.***

Genesis 1:1

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Look at that: “In the beginning, **God...**” (my emphasis)

We learn three things here.

### **1) God is first.**

In the beginning, God.

Many ancient peoples, the ancient Greeks being a good example, believed that the universe was around forever. That means the universe was first.

To the south and east of the ancient Greeks were the ancient Hebrews. God revealed himself to them. God taught the Hebrews that no, **He** was first. Everything else comes from **him**. God alone is eternal.

### **2) We learn next that God is powerful, beyond imagination.**

Can you lift a pebble? Sure. How about a boulder? That’s harder, but with some help and some tools, you could do it. How about a mountain? Practically speaking, it’s impossible.

God can, so to speak, lift planets and stars and galaxies. He created them all. He moves them at will. He is powerful.

### **3) God is all-knowing and all-wise.**

If you remember back to high school chemistry, you know that the building blocks of our universe are atoms. Atoms broke down, we were told, into electrons and protons and neutrons. Well, today, scientists say the parts of the atoms are even smaller and more numerous than we thought. Currently, scientists believe there are over 200 sub-particles that make up any given atom. Think about that: 200. And we’re pretty sure we haven’t found them all. There may be more.

To God, this is no mystery.

- He’s aware of every piece of every atom.
- He knows where every part of every atom is. (There are lots of them, and they move a lot)
- He knows where every atom is.
- He knows where every atom has been over all the eons the universe has existed.
- He knows where every atom, with every one of its parts will be for the rest of eternity.
- He’s aware of how to put atoms together into every form that we see in the universe.

If that boggles your mind, there's an easy way to make it practical. Let's just say **God knows what he's doing.**

That raises a question: Why would an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-wise God make a universe?

Genesis 1:27-27

So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

God makes humans in his image. In doing that, God shared something special with us; something he didn't share with anything else in all of creation. **We have a unique ability to understand him.**

He told Adam and Eve-

- Multiply (he wants lots of people).
- Fill the earth. (Go! Out there!)
- Subdue the earth – rule over it.
  - The word for "rule" includes both responsibility and privileges.
    - Responsibility: Good rulers manage things. They don't destroy them.
    - Privilege: We are rulers: Kings and Queens over the creation. We are all members of a royal family.

Now, why would he do this? Why would he make us kings and queens over the creation? Why would he give us a special ability to understand him?

You've heard, no doubt, that God loves you. I have come to believe that the word "love" is inadequate. We need a stronger word. God doesn't just love humans.

**God cherishes humans.**

That means, God cherishes you.

God cherishes humans. He created a beautiful planet and invited all humans to walk in it with him. He invites us to participate in a fantastic adventure with him.

Let's summarize what we have so far:

- God Is First.
- God is Powerful.
- God Knows What He's Doing.
- God Cherishes You.

So, life on earth was meant to be a fantastic adventure.

Now again, the problem. At least one person out there is thinking, "Sometimes life doesn't feel like a fantastic adventure". I hear you. What went wrong? What went wrong is our next point.

### **Rebellion: *Humans Try to be First.***

Genesis 3:2-4

2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and **you will be like God**, knowing good and evil."

Note the phrase that I underlined: "...you will be like God...".

In other words, the Serpent is telling Adam and Eve that they can be their own god. They can be "first", instead of God. There's a big problem here. God is first, whether anyone thinks so, or not. ***Trying to put yourself first is at the root of sin.*** That's what causes disobedience to God. We say, "I'm first, so I'll do what I want; not what God wants".

Sin has many terrible effects. One of those is: ***it results in a break between us and God.*** We no longer enjoy the wonderful plan that God had for humans. Sin results in death and all kinds of other pains that we experience here on the earth.

There's an even bigger concern. ***We can't fix this problem.*** Trust me. We can't.

Fortunately, God can. And fortunately for us, he took it upon himself to do just that. That happens in our next point.

### **Redemption: *God saves people from the effects of their sin and rebellion.***

Luke 1:68

68 "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them."

What does “redemption” mean? It includes concepts like:

- Rescue (Because we can’t save ourselves)
- Ransom (A price must be paid, and it’s too great for us alone)
- Reconciliation (Our broken relationship is repaired)

We said at the beginning that there were two parts to this. Past and Future. There are two types of people reading to this. First, some have already accepted Jesus as their Savior. They’ve recognized all of this. For them, this is all past - It’s done! If you’re part of this group, you’re ready to move on the “future” part.

For others, they’ve never come to the point of receiving Jesus as their Savior. So, the section on “Redemption” hasn’t been applied to them.

There’s no better time than now! Here’s the good news if you’re in this group: When you receive Jesus, all of this happens, as a free gift from God.

Ephesians 2:4-8

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

Paul is talking to believers. For them, everything that we just read is past tense. It’s already happened.

If you want to receive Jesus now, it’s a free gift. Let us tell you how. If you accept Jesus, you can join with all the people who are ready to look at the future.

**Because now, we’re ready to rebuild our relationship with God.**

## **II. Future**

**Rebuild: *We can get back on track with the wonderful plan that God has for us.***

We can get back to the adventure.

How do we do that?

### **A. *Re-prioritize***

Sin and rebellion started with the idea that we could be first. We need to get back to putting God first.

Exodus 20

1 And God spoke all these words:

2 “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 “You shall have no other gods before me.”

Revelation 1

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”

So, how do we put God first? We need to make the commitment.

- God is first. He just is.
- He must always be.

Sometimes, we can help our conviction with a reminder.

I’m going to summarize the points we made earlier.

- God Is First.
- God is Powerful.
- God Knows What He’s Doing.
- God Cherishes Me.

Say these words to yourself. Repeat this to yourself whenever you face a challenge. It will help.

**Important point:**

You will need to remind yourself because the adventure that God has for us is tailored for each person. Each journey has high points. Each journey has low points.

Once you have this conviction, you can move on to the next step. You must begin a process of **replacement**.

**B. Replacement.**

We must start replacing our values with God’s values.

Romans 12:2

2 Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

“Renew our minds.” How do we do that? We must start to learn God’s thoughts and values - The things that are important to him. God has instructed people to write down the things that are important to him. This happened over hundreds of years. That’s how we got our Bible.

As we read the Bible, we don’t merely learn facts. ***We meet God in the pages of the Bible.***

It's there that we learn what's important to him.

- What makes him happy?
- What makes him grieve?
- What makes him angry?

In order to learn these things, you must read. You must get your hands on a Bible and start reading. There's no substitute.

I know a man who's very interesting. He has a PhD in chemistry. He spent most of his life in industry but is now retired. We have some interesting discussions about faith. One day he asked me, "So, what makes you want to be a Christian, other than maybe your parents were Christians"?

The answer? My parents weren't Christians. I started hearing about Jesus from friends as a young person, but I was told by people I respected that the Bible was a pile of myths and fairy tales that no intelligent and responsible person believed.

Then one day, I read it for myself. I was amazed. It occurred to me that the people who told me the Bible was just a fairy tale book **could not possibly have read it themselves**. Later, I accepted Jesus as my Savior **based on what I read**.

When I encouraged this man to read the Bible for himself, like I did, he just said, "Well, I'm not a reader". The next time I see him, I'm going to tell him the following story:

A great king once went on a journey. He planned on travelling in a magnificent carriage surrounded by soldiers on horse and an entourage of footmen and other attendants. As he climbed into his carriage, off in the distance he saw a beautiful young woman. It was "love at first sight". He had to leave, so he told a trusted servant, "Find out where that young woman lives and then catch up with us". Later the servant caught up with the king's entourage and reported the home of the woman. The king wrote her a letter. He wrote at least one a day, entrusting the letters to his most faithful servants who delivered them. In those letters, he told her about his life. He told her about his passions. He reported things he did and saw on his journey. Most importantly, he told her about the great love that he has for her. Then one day, he returned home. The first thing he did was set out to visit the woman. He reached her front door with great excitement and knocked. She opened to see a powerful man with soldiers on horses all around him. She asked, "Who are you?" He proudly replied, "I am your king. I'm the one who sent you all of those letters." She was silent. It was an awkward moment, and as he thought about what to say next, he looked past her into her home. When he did this, he saw something that made his heart sink. He saw a pile of letters. His letters. *They were all unopened*. Heartbroken, he asked, "What is this? Why didn't you open my letters?" She responded by saying, "Well, I'm not much of a reader".

We all love fairy tales. We all like to hear stories of a king falling in love with a young girl and elevating her from commoner to royalty. *All that the young woman in this story had to do to enjoy such a rare offer was to become a reader.*

It's the same with us. The King of the Universe loves us and wants to show us his love. One way to look at the Bible is to say that it's love letters from God to us.

***It's in your best interest to become a reader.***

When we read the Bible, we learn what's important to God. Then, we allow his values to replace our values.

In the Bible passage we read a moment ago, we're told to avoid conforming to "The patterns of this world." What are those?

Recall that, in the Garden, Adam and Eve were ready to embark on the wonderful adventure that God planned for them. Then, they heard another voice. The voice of the serpent. And sadly, they listened to that voice.

One way to look at the Christian life is to say that it's a battle against the "other voices". In many places in the Bible, they're called the "other gods". The Serpent was the first of those voices, the first "other god". Many theologians call this "idolatry". Idolatry, in its simplest form, is to say that there is one true God, and there are the "other gods", the other voices. I write about this in my book, "The Idols on the Hills".

In the garden, it was one voice. Today, it has multiplied to LOTS of voices. We are surrounded by them. They say a lot of different things, but those things all have one idea in common. The voices tell us that we shouldn't trust the one true God. We should trust something else. We're trying to be concise, so we can't go into examples now. How do you overcome all these voices? How can we face them? This brings us to our final point. We need ***reinforcement***.

**Reinforcement: *No one can do this alone!***

When Adam and Eve fell, they tried to take on the Serpent alone. They didn't have to do that. And, we don't, either! Our help comes from two places.

- God.
- Other believers

We learn about God's help in the following passage:

Psalm 46

1 God is our refuge and strength,  
an ever-present help in trouble.

God wants to help. Ask him! After that, there's a whole community of people who have followed God through the centuries.

#### Hebrews 10

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Where is a good place to find other believers so you can “meet together”? The answer: Find a good church! Once there, let other believers pray for you, teach you, and help you. As you grow, then you can help others.

#### Conclusion

Today we looked at “Christianity in a Nutshell.” We visited some events from the past. We talked about God's plan for us, which he revealed to us (**Revelation**). We talked about our problem (**Rebellion**). We talked about God's solution to our problem (**Redemption**).

We rejoice in the fact that, if you've accepted Jesus as Savior, all of that is past. Or, you can accept the free gift that God offers to you. You can enjoy the adventure. Talk to us, we'll tell you how.

In the future, you need to:

- **Rebuild** our relationship with God. God has a plan for you.
- **Reprioritize** – Put God first.
- **Replace** – Replace our values and the world's patterns with God's values.
- And finally, you need **Reinforcement**. Don't do this alone. Ask God for help. Ask your fellow believers for help.

So, there it is - Christianity in a nutshell.

I hope this was helpful. May God bless you.