

The Christian Faith in a Nutshell

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Introduction

In this article, we're going to review what the Christian Faith is all about.

Every now and then I run into an expression that's helpful, but mysterious. One of those expressions is "in a nutshell". You likely have heard someone say, "Well, 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?



Well, the phrase means "to summarize" or, "to take a long, complex topic, and say it in a few words". Ok. That's good to know. But 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. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Every now and then, someone who wants to learn about the Christian faith asks me to summarize it in a few minutes. Could you do that if someone asked you? 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**.

Let's see how that works.

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.

Future

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

As a note, we'll cover a range of material today, from simple and elementary, to advanced. I'll ask the folks who might be starting at a more advanced position to hang on while we work through the elementary material.

A final note: Many of our points today start with the letter "R".

So, let's begin.

I. Past:

A. Revelation

The first thing we need to learn about is: Revelation That means: God reveals himself to us. All you have to do to learn about this is look at the opening pages of the Bible. We learn how God created the world and humans: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (Genesis 1:1)" We could learn something important by concentrating on just the first 4 words: "In the beginning, **God...**"

We learn three things here.

1) The first thing we learn is that **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 southeast of the ancient Greeks were some important people: 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 - Powerful beyond anything we can imagine. To illustrate: Can you lift a pebble? Sure. How about a boulder? That's harder. How about a mountain? Impossible. God can, so to speak, lift planets and stars and galaxies. He moves them at will. He can do so because 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 break down, we were told, into electrons and protons and neutrons. Today, scientists believe that the parts of 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 – 200! And we're pretty sure we haven't found them all. There may be many 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 - And that's hard, because they move a lot. He's aware of how to put atoms together into molecules - And from there, every form that we see in the universe. 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.

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

This raises a question: Why would an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-wise God make a universe? Let's read some more in Genesis and find out.

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."

(Genesis 1:27-28)

God made the universe, and then made humans. God made humans in his image. When he did that, God shared something special with them, and with all of us - Something that he has not shared with anything else in all of creation:

Humans have a unique ability to understand God.

Because of this, because we can understand important things about God, God reveals things about himself to us.

What does this involve? To start, God told Adam and Eve to do some things:

- 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. The next is important: This results in amazing privilege.

Here's the privilege: We are rulers: Kings and Queens over God's creation. Now, why would God do that? Why would he make a universe, and then make us kings and queens over his creation? Here's why: You've heard, no doubt, that God loves you. That's actually inadequate. Modern English has watered-down the word "love". We say, "I love ice cream". God's feelings towards us are much stronger than that. So, we need a stronger word. God doesn't just love humans. **God cherishes humans.** That means, God cherishes you. Yes - God cherishes humans. He created a beautiful planet, put humans there, and then invited all humans to walk in it with him. That means he invites us to participate in a fantastic adventure with him.

Think about that for a moment.

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 where we walk with God.

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

B. Rebellion

What went wrong was our next point: "Rebellion." In this rebellion, humans try to be first. Let's read about it:

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." (Genesis 3:2-4)

Look at that: "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". There's a big problem here. You see, God is first, whether anyone thinks so, or not. When people try to put themselves first before God, something terrible happens: Sin. Here's an important principle:

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 being: Sin causes a fracture in our relationship with 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.*** Just trust me. We can't. Fortunately, God can. And fortunately for us, he took it upon himself to do just that.

C. Redemption

That happens with: ***Redemption***: God saves people from the effects of their sin and rebellion.

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has come to his people and redeemed them. (Luke 1:68)

What's involved with redemption? Redemption includes concepts like:

- Rescue (We need to be rescued: We can't save ourselves)
- Ransom (A price must be paid when we sin)
- Reconciliation (Our broken relationship with God is repaired)

Up to this point, we've looked at some important things. Let's see how they apply to us. We said at the beginning that there were two parts to this. Past and Future. Now, there are two types of people listening to this. Some have already accepted Jesus as their Savior. They've recognized all of this. For those people, it's done! You're ready to move on the "future" part.

Others have never heard of all this. Or, maybe they heard, but they've never applied it. So, the section on 'redemption' hasn't happened yet for these people. Well, there's no better time than now! There's good news if you're in this group: God wants to give you all this as a free gift - Yes, a free gift. How does he do it? He does that through Jesus Christ.

We read about it in the book of Ephesians:

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. (Ephesians 2:4-9)

Paul is talking to believers here – people who have chosen to become followers of Jesus Christ. For them, everything that we just read is past tense. Everything we’ve read has already happened. If you want to receive Jesus now, it’s just like we read: It’s a free gift. You receive the free gift when you believe in Jesus Christ. Let us tell you how to do that. Let us tell you how all of this can apply to you. There will be some important links at the end of this article.

If you reach the point of believing in Jesus, you can join with all the people who are ready to look at the future.

II. Future : Rebuild

So, let’s do it. Let’s look to the future. Now, we can rebuild our relationship with God. You can get back on track with the wonderful plan that God has for you. You can get back to the adventure. How do we do that?

A. Re-prioritize

First, we need to Re-prioritize. Sin and rebellion started with the idea that we could be first. We need to get back to putting God first. Let’s read two statements from the Scripture:

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.” (Exodus 20)

8 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” “Alpha” and “Omega” are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

By saying, “I am the alpha and the omega”, God is saying, “I am first, and last”. “I am the beginning and the end of all things.” (Revelation 1:8-9)

We need to put God first. How do we do that?

Well, first, we need to make the commitment: Put God first.

God is first. He just is. He must always be. As a practical matter, your actions must fall in line with this truth.

Sometimes, we can help our conviction with a reminder. I’m going to summarize the points we made earlier so we can do an exercise.

Write these sentences down. Consider saying them out loud as you read:

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

Repeat this to yourself whenever you face a challenge. Remind yourself.

Important point: You will need to remind yourself on a regular basis 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.

Replacement means: We must start replacing our values with God's values.

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. (Romans 12:2)

You must “renew your mind.” How do we do that? We must start to learn God's thoughts and values. The things that are important to him.

As it turns out, 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 is no substitute.

I have a man in my apartment building who is 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”? Well, actually, my parents weren't Christians.

I started hearing about Jesus from friends, 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. When I did that, I can only say I was amazed. I felt that the people who told me that it 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”.

For all of you who don’t consider yourself to be a reader, consider the following story: A wealthy and powerful king falls in love with a woman who is a commoner. He starts to write her letters. In those letters, he tells her about his life. He tells her about his passions. He tells her about the great love that he has for her. Then one day, he finally visits her. In her home, he sees his letters in a pile, unopened. So he asks, “What’s this? Those are all the letters I wrote to you!” She responds by saying, “Well, I’m not much of a reader”.

What is that wealthy and powerful king going to think?

Ladies and gentlemen, 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**. Because when we read the Bible we learn what’s important to God. We can then choose to allow his values to replace our values.

In the text we just read, we’re told to avoid conforming to “The patterns of this world.” What are those?

Recall the story we read earlier from the Bible: The story of Adam and Eve. God created the first humans, Adam and Eve, and placed them in the garden of Eden. 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, those voices are called the “other gods”. The Serpent was the first of those voices, the first “other god”. Many theologians call the business of following other gods, “idolatry”. Idolatry, in its simplest form, is to say that there is one true God, and there are the ‘other gods’, the other voices - With Idolatry, people follow the other gods. I write about this in my book, “The Idols on the Hills”.

In the garden, there was one “other” voice. Today, there are LOTS of voices. We are surrounded by them, the ‘other voices’. They say a lot of different things, but those things all have one idea in common. The voices tell us that we should not trust the one true God. We should trust someone or something else.

We're constrained by space, so we can't go into examples now. We can only ask, how do you overcome these voices which are so numerous? How can we face them?

This brings us to our final point.

C. Reinforcement

We need reinforcement - No one can do this alone! Adam and Eve fell away from God because 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. 1) God and 2) other believers.

Concerning God:

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. (Psalm 46:1)

God wants to help you. Ask him!

Then, there is the whole community of people who have followed God through the centuries.

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. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Find a good church. If you live in Northern NJ, consider ours – Trinity Church of Teaneck, NJ. Again, there's some info at the end of this article. Don't face the gods of this world alone. You need help. Seek that help from God. Find a good church and let others help you. Then, once you're grown in your faith, maybe you can help others.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

So, today we looked at "Christianity in a Nutshell." We visited some events from the past. We talked about Revelation: God reveals himself to us and invites us on an incredible adventure. We talked about our problem: Rebellion – Humans try to put themselves first. We talked about God's solution to our problem: Redemption - God saves us.

If you've accepted Jesus as Savior, all of that is past. If not, you can rejoice in the free gift that God offers to you. You can enjoy the adventure. Contact us, we'll tell you how.

In the future, we need to: Rebuild our relationship with God. Reprioritize – Put God first.
Replace – Replace our values and the worlds patterns with God’s values. And finally, we need reinforcement. Don’t do this alone. Ask God for help. Find a good church.

So, there it is. That’s Christianity in a nutshell. I hope it’s helpful.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil’s Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham’s site:

PeaceWithGod.net
