Before the Beginning

Genesis 1:1-3

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Initial Insights

Scripture isn't a bunch of disconnected Aesop's Fables or Proverbs. If this were the case, the Bible would primarily be about us and what we should do. But, read rightly – the Bible is a single story, not about us but about God and what God has done on our behalf!

He made the world, it was devastated because of sin, He re-entered the world through His Son Jesus, He's in the process of redeeming all creation, and one day soon He's going to create a new Heaven & Earth – as one!

The Bible is so long, it's easy to miss the forest for the trees. It's challenging to interpret at times because there are so many genres: poetry, history, prophecy, parables…

But again, the Bible is not a collection of separate stories that moralize about all the things that we need to do; but rather, a single story of what God has done to create, redeem, restore & perfect His creation!

Is it possible in a single sermon series to give the whole Big Picture of the Bible? This is a daunting undertaking! But, yes! Because Tim Keller did it with his congregation in New York several years ago. And, we're going to seize that challenge here at CBC because we think it's so important!

*This goal ties in with our discipleship theme involving 30 Days To Understanding the Bible, and seeing the interconnectedness of Scripture!

In this teaching series, which we're calling **The Whole Story**, we're going to look at the first four chapters of the Bible, the middle four chapters of the Bible, and then the last four chapters of the Bible - Genesis 1-4, Romans 1-4 & Revelation 19-22!

As we begin today, we actually get not only a glimpse of the beginning – the creation of the universe, but what was going on before the beginning of Creation!

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. Genesis 1:1–3 (NLT)

We see three things before the beginning: God, Love & Darkness. And, each one of these is crucially important!

Before the Beginning There Was…

1. God

When the world began, God was there because He's the only One without beginning or end (eternal). And therefore, everything else is grounded in God and finds its proper origin in God.

The Big Bang stipulates that there were certain chemicals that came together to form the universe. Now, that may be how God created the universe; but these chemicals would have found their origin in God. They did not supersede God!

Jean Paul Sartre: 20th century French Philosopher – a landmark lecture given in 1946 (just after WW2), called "**Existentialism is a Humanism**."

Background: Sartre saw himself as an existential humanist.

Existentialism is nothing else but an attempt to draw the full conclusions of a consistently atheistic position.

The problem with the atheism of the 19th century (represented by people like Nietzsche, Marx and Bertrand Russell), is that it abolished God, but still insisted that there were things like values, absolutes and human nature. That there were things that we must do, because they're good for everyone to do.

Atheistic Existentialism, of which I am a representative, declares with greater consistency that if God does not exist then we have to face the consequences of this. We are not made for a purpose like a paper knife. And therefore, there is no a priori good! Nowhere is it written that humans must be honest, must not lie… As Dostoevsky once wrote: "If God does not exist, then everything is permitted!"

A Priori = Self-evident truths that we accept without argument or explanation.

(My assessment of Sartre's philosophical reasoning is that it's inconsistent, because he basically has man replacing the role of God.)

Man exists first (Big Bang Theory/Evolution) vs. God exists first

Philosophical theory: **Existence precedes essence**.

Basically, that things don't exist without/apart from a purpose behind them!

Sartre used the example of a paper knife. A paper knife can be judged as <u>good</u> or <u>bad</u> only it's made for a purpose. We then judge how well it fulfills its purpose. It's good for cutting paper, not for carving rock. We can't go against its purpose.

True freedom isn't doing whatever we want to do, but rather living in a way that's consistent with our purpose – with why we were made!

**<u>Illustration</u>: playing a guitar! (video)

Either God made us for a purpose, and we can be evaluated (deemed good or bad) according to our fulfillment of this purpose. Or, we're just ever-evolving creatures that can't make moral judgments because there's no grand purpose in the universe!

We have to be consistent, <u>both</u> in our philosophy and theology!

In these opening verses of Genesis, we see God the Father and God the Spirit creating through the Word, <u>God the Son</u>!

So, God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female he created them.   Genesis 1:27 (NLT)

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, [16] for through Him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through Him and for Him.
          Colossians 1:15–16 (NLT)

... And the Spirit of God was *hovering* over the surface of the waters.   Genesis 1:2 (NLT)

This word *hovering*, in the Hebrew language, often depicts the beautiful image of a mother bird hovering over her young!

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2] He existed in the beginning with God. [3] God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.
John 1:1–3 (NLT)

In Him was *life*, and the life was the Light of men.   John 1:4 (NASB95)

This phrase emphasizes that "*life*" comes from the Son, the Word. John uses the term, *zoē*, to refer to resurrection life, eternal life, God's life, instead of using the Greek word *bios*, which merely communicates earthly, biological life.

Before the beginning, God existed! And, <u>All</u> other life finds its origin in God!!

Before the Beginning There Was…

2. Love

Love presupposes God, because it doesn't exist in a vacuum. And, it communicates two essential things to us:

1. The primacy of relationships

Because love happens/takes place in the context of relationships!

But, it's hard to be successful in this world, at our jobs, in business and also maintain loving relationships – a healthy family, a healthy marriage.

The world's paradigm is power and then love. If there's no God, then power is the ultimate reality!

But if there's a God then continually putting power and advancement in front of relationships will lead to our destruction! Because we weren't built for that. We were made for community and relationships.

God is love! Love existed first and God invites us into this love relationship! Love before power, love before creation!

Ultimate reality is the primacy of relationships – not power, not advancement, not achievement, not personal pleasure.

But, it's not just the primacy of relationships. It's also...

2. The Nature of Relationships

Love is other-oriented, putting the needs of others above our own.

Even Sartre ended-up with this!

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always glorifying one another. They're completely other-oriented! Each was holds the other at the center of their very being.

Since God is triune, this means the very essence of reality is to put the needs of others above our own!

 To defer, to serve (Philippians 2). Selfishness is at odds with ultimate reality since we were designed and made for mutual self-giving!

C. S. Lewis describes this more beautifully than anyone I've ever read or heard:

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis writes,

When people say "God is love" they do not seem to notice that the words "God is love" have no real meaning unless God contains at least two persons…. If God was a single person, then before the world was made, He was not love.

The only way we can experience true happiness and joy is by entering the dance of the three-personal life. Love arises out of participating in the pulsating energy of the triune love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our love is preceded by the Divine love and proceeds from the Divine self-giving of the cross.

Lewis continues in *The Problem of Pain*,

In self-giving we touch a rhythm, not only of all creation, but of all being. For the Eternal Word gives Himself in sacrifice, not only on Calvary… But from the foundation of the world. He surrenders begotten Deity back to begetting Deity in obedience… From the highest to the lowest, self exists to be abdicated and, by that abdication, becomes more truly self, to be thereupon yet the more abdicated, and so forever.

To refuse to be involved in this pattern (this dance) is to be imprisoned within yourself. To be outside the system of self-giving is simply "Hell."

At the beginning I said there were Personalities in God. I will go further now. There are no personalities anywhere else. Until you have given up yourself to Him you will not have a real self…. Give up yourself, and you will find your true self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favorite wishes every day and the death of your whole body. Submit with every fiber of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back Nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will really be yours! Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in!

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was <u>toward</u> God, and the Word was God.

John 1:1

(NASB95)

God has invited us into the <u>love relationship</u> of Father, Son & Holy Spirit. God has invited us to be part of this <u>divine</u> community!

Before the Beginning There Was…

3. <u>Darkness</u>

The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters.   Genesis 1:2 (NLT)

Darkness – the earth was formless and empty! God is describing shapeless chaos!

But when the Word of God begins to speak, the darkness dispels and there's orderliness and there's light!

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it!   John 1:5 (NLT)

"THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED."
Matthew 4:16 (NASB95)

"I have come *as* Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness." John 12:46 (NASB95)

For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:6 (NASB95)

Sin unleashes the very forces of chaos and darkness. Because sin violates the very fabric of our being, and unravels God's creation.

The plagues of Egypt were symbolic of the very unravelling of God's creation.

It's interesting that at Christ's crucifixion we see darkness enter the picture again:

At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. Matthew 27:45 (NLT)

The chaotic forces of darkness and evil are falling upon Jesus! The plague of the death of the firstborn. This is God's firstborn!

Jesus is the Creator who came to earth, not to smite us but so that He might be uncreated so that we could be recreated!

Jesus is the Maker who was willing to be unmade so that we could be remade!

Jesus is the judge who came not to bring judgment, but to bear judgment! To take upon Himself what we deserved, so that He could give us what only His righteousness could provide!

Closing Comments

*Communion