

# The Christmas Rush: The Big Bang

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Date: 05 December 1990

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[ 0 : 00 ] This whole faith in the marketplace... As Jim Cruikshank said, we're looking at the first chapter of John, which is often the Christmas gospel in church, so that we need to try and sort it out.

And I'm going to try and sort it out today for you in one way, but remember that what happens is that you look at Scripture, and Scripture points you to things that God, by His Spirit, wants to teach you, so that you have to be in that kind of circumstance.

I had a wonderful illustration, which is sort of like this, this being a fish.

And the illustration was that if you want to know about water, don't ask a fish, because it's just so much a part of his life that he can't comprehend the fact that it's there.

And I think probably much of that is true about us in that we are so surrounded, supported, maintained, nourished, and fed by the hand of God.

[ 1 : 56 ] If you want to know about God, it's just not to ask him. Here? Because it's too close. You can't define it very easily. So that's what it says.

If you want to know about water, don't ask a fish. If you don't want to know about God, don't ask one of us, because it's too close for us. And what this passage in John tries to do is to give us a little distance.

The way I thought you might conceive of it is that if you were to draw a large fish out of the water and put him on the bottom of your boat and talk to him about water, he would have a lot to say.

And there would be a relationship immediately between him and the surrounding, which he no longer has, so that once you get out of touch with God, you learn quite a lot about God.

And some of you may be able to testify to that in your own experience. So that's one of the things I want you to have in the back of your mind, that the experts on God may be the fish out of water, so to speak.

[ 3 : 04 ] Now, the passage that I want you to look at, this starts in the beginning, was the Word.

Now, if you think of yourself, you know, you've had many years of experience, you've read many books, you've been many places, you've been to school, you've studied, you've done a whole lot of things, and now there is put in front of you a large piece of paper and a pen, and you sit down and you want to write the story of what it all means.

So you start, well now, in the beginning, now you know that it's pretty hopeless to know where you're going to go from there, isn't it? I mean, like most people start the book with three shots rang out and a body slumped to the floor, you know, but you're right in the middle of the action right away.

But if you try and say it, like in the beginning, what do you say? Now, I read this article this past week, which talked about the beginning.

Now, it has to do with these things. It has to do with matter, which we do understand, because we're, as you all know, we're materialists, that's it.

And then there's energy. And this wonderful scientific article or article about Ed Furkin in Atlantic Monthly of 1988, he said that the three basic ingredients are, in the beginning, information.

[ 4 : 55 ] Now, that's a lovely way to start, isn't it, for us, because we are all proud members of the information age. And what we have learned to do, particularly in this generation, is we've learned to get information, great infinite amounts of information.

We have information coming at us from every possible quarter all the time. And that information feeds us, and out of that information, things start to happen.

You get to work in the morning, the phone rings, information is conveyed. In response to that information, you work through the day, trying to deal with the information you've received.

So that, this is quite an entertaining and stimulating, and perhaps even close to the ultimate truth, that in the beginning, information. And that information leads to matter and energy.

And that's how it works. So that's one way of looking at it. If you were to start by saying, in the beginning was a total lack of information, you would have nothing.

[ 6 : 12 ] I mean, there wouldn't be anywhere to start, because you wouldn't even have the words with which to say, in the beginning, there was a lack of information. This fellow I'm talking about, he says that even a mouth is a very complex piece of information.

It's all put together according to the basic ingredients of reality, you know, that the sort of subatomic particles really are particles of information.

information. And they come together and they form being. So that he's, he's, he's got this theory, but he's having trouble convincing people of it.

And the only reason I like it is because it comes very close to what John said in the beginning of his gospel, when he said, in the beginning was the word. Now the word is obviously information.

But I want to come back to that in a minute. if you start by saying in the beginning there was God, then it leaves you in the difficult position of having to decide who God is.

[ 7 : 26 ] And the only thing that you, I can be sure about God is that he isn't who you think he is. In other words, he is not the product of your thinking. He stands over, against, and other than, and different from, and altogether outside of anything that you can conceive of.

So you can't start with in the beginning God, because you've got to have something more than that, because you can't relate to that total abstraction. And if you do, all you do is create your own particular idolatry.

So that doesn't work. You're familiar with the fact that in the beginning was a Big Bang, you know, that's how it all started.

And what that means in a sense is that the whole thing started by spontaneous generation.

generation. But what it did, what that Big Bang created, was an entire universe in which the one thing that never happens is spontaneous generation.

So it started from something that doesn't happen within it. And, you know, philosophers and people like that worry about it. I just speculate from a great distance about what that means.

[ 8 : 53 ] I think what it means is that you can create something from something but you can't create something from nothing. And it doesn't matter how big the bang is.

That doesn't happen in our kind of world. So that's one of the theories we live with. Like the theory in the beginning God and that God is someone we created or in the beginning information.

But what does that mean? When you come to the very beginning of the Bible, Genesis chapter 1, you have in the beginning God created. So there was action.

It wasn't, it didn't start with an idea. It started with action, a creation happening. Now how did this creation happen? Well, Genesis says that what you have is that which is without form, which is void, which is dark, which is deep.

So that's an attempt to explain how it all started. Without form, void, darkness, deep.

[ 10 : 06 ] That's why I would like to suggest that the most valuable drawing would be this one. Because this approaches nothing.

and if you could get an artist who could portray nothing, you would have a brilliant artist indeed. So we'll leave that one for Tom to sell. But what happens then when you pick up from Genesis and start to talk about John and this passage that you have in front of you, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Now, that, the scholars say, is a hymn, an early Christian hymn, which was trying to explain the sort of bottom-line reality of our Christian faith for people who perhaps were not brought up in the Old Testament.

You know, all the good, well-grounded Old Testament sermons begin with the phrase, this is that. You know, and they go on from there, by which they mean, this is that which was spoken of in the Old Testament and has happened now and is continuing to happen in Christ and in his church.

So that all the Old Testament sermons start with this is that, and the that is the revelation of God in the Old Testament. But if people don't have the Old Testament, aren't familiar with it, where do you start?

[ 11 : 44 ] So John the Baptist says, this is where, John's Gospel says, this is where you start. You with, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And that is, whatever this word is, which, you know, is, that's, that's the, the, sort of approximation of the Greek, this word, whatever it is, however you come to understand it, it was with God, so that it, it was, it wasn't separate from God, it was, it was with God, it found all its meaning within the reality of God, that's all there was, was this word.

Now, it didn't exhaust who God was, but it was part, at least, of who God was, so that in the beginning was this word, so that whatever happened, whatever God did, and Genesis says, in the beginning God created, what God did, he did through the word.

So John says, it all began with the word. and the Bible takes words very seriously. It says that, you know, the whole of creation is God spoke and it was done.

The word of God spoken produces a reality which you confront. In other words, what God says and you hear, you can pick up with your hand. That's the kind of word, or you can measure.

[ 13 : 28 ] in the beginning God created through his word. Well, then the other thing about it is that this word expresses who God is, but doesn't tell the totality of who God is.

So if you look at the text again, it says, the word, this is, I'm skipping to verse 14 now, remember that we've left out a lot of verses. The word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

Well, this, this is what happens, you see. A lot of people tend to think that you start out on your journey here and you wander and wander and wander, presumably in an upward direction, until you get here where you find truth.

and that what life is, is a disciplined journey, which you go through, a process of education in which you start from nothing and you gradually work your way towards truth.

Now, when you come to John's gospel, what it says is that truth is not something that is given.

[ 14 : 59 ] It's something that God has revealed about himself, so that the only way that there can be truth is as God reveals it. And what we need to know is the truth.

It's not the end of this process here. It's something which God spontaneously makes known to us and we confront it. So that truth is consistent, it's always the same because it's not subject to erosion, it's not subject to changes of fashion, it's not subject to philosophical frameworks, it's not subject to a particular culture, it's something which God has revealed and which is always and everywhere the same.

in the sense that that's why Hebrews says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It means that when we're looking for the truth that is spoken of in the New Testament, it's not something which the Greeks discovered or the Hebrews discovered or the black people discovered or the Arabs discovered or the Chinese discovered.

The truth is something which is revealed. It comes from God, therefore nobody owns it. Western Europe didn't discover it. So Western Europe tends to think it did.

But there it is. It's something which is revealed by God, this matter of truth. It's something which is consistent. It's something you do.

[ 16 : 33 ] It's not just something you think, because that's what this process is here. It's something that you do. You do the truth. And that's one of the cardinal principles of teaching about the truth, is that it's something you do.

I noticed Jim Cruikshank. It said to you that our gospel is both something we believe and something we do. But in fact they are inseparable. What you believe and what you do are locked in together. Jim's left, isn't he? I mean, I can say that. All right. It's in that way. So that it's and truth demands worship.

That is, the truth is something which it's not something which you can ignore. It's not something which you can say ho-hum. It's not something which you can file away under T in your filing system. Truth is something which when it breaks in upon you, it demands your worship. You see, because that's the revelation of God. That's why Christmas is an easy time to worship, because this is what we're working on.

[ 17 : 47 ] The revelation of God, you know, in the night sky to the shepherds, the breaking in of the incarnate word into our world. And that's why we sing the first Noel and all those kinds of things, because we're recognizing the reality of the word of God breaking into our world, and our somehow having to respond to that at the deepest level of who we are, and that response is what we call worship.

And, you know, one of the Hebrew word, I guess, for truth is amen. That's why if you hear it, you should acknowledge it by saying amen.

Amen. but, you know, the trouble is you might belong to the NDP party and your concept of the truth might be slightly just a little off-center. And you might drag our whole meeting off in the wrong direction.

So if you do say it, be very careful where you're speaking from, that you are responding to revealed truth and not just setting forth your own particular prejudices and calling them truth.

But that's how that works. Now, the difficulty, of course, with truth is, and, is that it's, it's pretty, we're, we're incompatible with it.

[ 19 : 16 ] I mean, it doesn't fit our world. When you find the truth, it tends to kill you. And I'm, I'm quite serious about that because I think that's why, why a lot of us you know, I mean, it's why when you get older, like me, you tend to get depressed and discouraged because you see the truth, you know, and you recognize that the truth is going to be there when you're gone and that you're not part of it, you know, that it is consistent and it is always there and it always will be whatever this truth is.

It will always be there, but you won't always be there. And coming to terms with the truth is therefore a difficult experience. One way that I could illustrate it, it's like a man and a woman who fall in love with each other and they carry on a lovely relationship which they enjoy enormously and find a great deal of self-fulfillment in that relationship.

And then she is found to be pregnant. and then that relationship has what we call a moment of truth.

What do you do with it? There is another reality. And I'm speaking, I'm not speaking about the structures of our culture, I'm just telling you in principle how this works because I don't want to get into all of that at this point.

The child is conceived, it is an unmistakable reality and the relationship between two people has resulted in an ineradicable truth.

[ 21 : 02 ] And that truth is the reality of the pregnancy which could be, and I guess often is, totally incompatible. And so when with the circumstances of the lives of those individuals, the truth is there.

You've got it right in front of you. And so you recognize at a very deep level that having confronted that truth, having been faced by that truth, somebody's got to die.

Now, I want this to be lighthearted, I don't want you to get heavy about it, but this is the fact of it.

Somebody's got to die. And so what happens generally is the man takes off and says, I don't think I was there when it happened, and that's goodbye to him.

Unfortunately, the woman can't do that. And she is left with the reality, the truth, that won't go away. And so she has to say, well, what am I going to do?

Well, through modern clinical procedures, she can walk away too. But you see, somebody still has to die. And that's what happens to the child.

[ 22 : 25 ] The child has to die. Now, that's a kind of illustration of what happens when you come up against the truth.

Now, what it means is that we live in a world where it is necessary for people to learn to die.

Because that's what the truth demands. And the tragedy of our world is that there's a whole lot of people who don't know how to die and don't want to learn.

But by the reason of the fact that they live in a world where truth has come into that world, there is no escape from it.

You can't sidestep it. And so what you need is somebody who will teach you how to die. You know, in order that.

[ 23 : 33 ] Now, what I mean by that is that for the man and the woman together, they say, we have conceived a child, therefore we must die to our own needs and demands and give ourselves to the raising of this child.

The man may opt out on that and say, I have no responsibility here, and leave it to the woman who has to say, well, am I going to die in order that this child may live? And she may answer that, no, I'm not.

So the child dies. And you see, the difficulty is that those two people didn't know how to die, even though they all have to. So that the essential thing in living our lives is to learn how to die in order

that the truth does not have to be dishonored, in order that the truth can be acknowledged and set up in front of everybody.

And that's why this passage says, and I'm going to have to come back to it next week, but that's why the passage says, the word became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

So that when you recognize the fact that you have to die, that death is part of what life is all about, then you have the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to teach you how to die.

[ 25 : 07 ] Now I don't mean to lie down in your bed and not wake up in the morning, but I mean to live your life in which you have learned how to die. That's what Christ said, if you want to follow me, take up your cross and follow me.

Learn how to die. And to die, to yourself in order that the truth will not be dishonored by you or me. And God gives us the grace to face the truth in the same person in whom he confronts us with the truth.

And that person is Jesus Christ. And if it was just full of truth, that would be totally devastating. But it's full of grace and truth.

The truth is the reality of having to face death, the grace is that in facing death, in that way alone, do we enter into eternal life?

[ 26 : 10 ] Do we experience what life is all about? It's only in having faced that, that you discover that Christ came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

That's the place you have to go. that's what the truth demands of us. And so just beginning this series of three, let me summarize it by saying in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

And you see, we can't face the truth unless we know the reality of the grace. We just can't do it. And that's why when God reveals his own heart to us, he reveals him in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is God become flesh and dwelt among us. And in the person of Jesus Christ, we learn, these two startling facts, the startling realities.

Grace on the one hand and truth on the other. Remind me to tell you next week what grace is more fully. Let me pray. Our God, we live in a world in which you have confronted us with the truth, and we find it fairly alien to us.

[ 27 : 45 ] We don't know how to deal with it. and we need your grace in order that we might learn to deal with it. We need to be taught how to die in order that we may live.

Grant us grace us. That we may come to the only one who can teach us how to die and through whom you have granted to us life, even our Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen. for Amen. Amen. Amen.