

BEFORE THE BEGINNING

Assorted Scriptures

INTRODUCTION

Part of preaching is understanding and communicating the time of events being described and the events themselves. The preacher must understand and communicate what is necessary about the location, the background, the era, the people, the land.
You must understand the language of the time.

The sermon this morning is unique. There is no location. There is no era. There is no land. There is no language. There are no recorded human events. In fact, there are no people.

There is no time ... literally. I do not mean “no time” in the sense of not enough time. I mean no such thing as time. → because God had not yet created time.

As I was preparing to launch into our Exposition of Genesis 1-11, I knew the title of the first sermon early on. “**In the Beginning**”

As I was studying for this first sermon, “In the Beginning,” my mind was drawn to ... what about “**Before the Beginning**”?

→ Eternity Past

I was then faced with the conundrum, a puzzle, a challenge.
– How do you preach a sermon on Eternity Past???

As a side note, when you google “eternity past” you receive links to, and I don’t use this technical term lightly, extreme whackos ... and a lot of error.

No less a stellar mind and theologian Augustine said,
– “*He is mad who looks for anything before the beginning.*”

But ... what does God tell us in the Bible about Eternity Past??

Well, there is the Presence of God.
There is also: Love, Communication, and a Plan.

There is Purpose and a Promise.
There is Thought, Will, and Decree.

There is Election. There is a Book of Life.
There is a Gift. And there is Grace.

→ There is a lot that God has to say in Scripture about Eternity Past. ☺

Proposition: God gives us **4 Revelations** of Eternity Past in the Bible:

1. There was **Perfection**.
2. There was **Purpose**.
3. There was **Promise**.
4. There was **Predestination**.

So That: I really believe that if we grasp these infinitely glorious reflections and revelations given to us by God in the Bible, we will grow in all aspects of our faith in Christ. We will grow in our understanding of God, in our understanding of His grace, in the thanksgiving that we have and the ability to praise and serve God, in our passion in our evangelism, and the list goes on..... and with the indwelling Holy Spirit, we can understand these deep truths.

1st Revelation of Eternity Past God gives ...

1. Perfection

Point – Perfection in His Being. Perfection in His Glory. Perfection in the reality of the Trinity.

Throughout all Eternity Past, nothing existed but God. Nothing else existed visible or invisible. Nothing came into being until “God created the heavens and the earth”.

There is the Personal God in all eternity.

Perfection in His Being

Proof – **John 1:1-2** – “**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.**”

John begins his gospel with the words, “**In the beginning**” so it might seem at first he doesn’t take us into Eternity Past. But he does, subtly in the more expressive Greek grammar of the verbs he uses. (the English word “was”)

- Greek tense - Imperfect - in **vv.1-2** - describes in the original Greek language a continual activity in the past
- Greek tense - Aorist and Perfect in **v. 3** - John shifts to these other tenses that mean already existing

→ So vv. 1-2 could be literally translated - “In the beginning the Word was already being ...”

So, before Creation, before Incarnation → the Word always was

Col 1:16-17 – “**For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together**”

- God certainly was before all things in His rule, His authority, His position as the Creator God

- He was also before all things as He was before the time of creation

Isa 43:13 – “Even from eternity I am He”

Hab 1:12 – “Are you not from everlasting, O LORD my God, my Holy One?”

Psa 90:2 – “Before the mountains were born, or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God”

- this is the root of all biblical doxology and the practice of giving God glory

There is perhaps no better way to begin our understanding of God than by viewing Him as He existed alone, apart from His creation.

- unlike creation, God is self-existent, uncaused, and independent
- the invisible things in the angelic realm, and the physical things - all of God's created universe - the physical and the spiritual - are dependent upon God

Acts 17:24-25 – “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things”

Illustration: In pagan religions still today, the gods are given food sacrifices because they need them. Not so with God.

The theological term for this is: **Aseity** → God has life in Himself and draws His unending energy from Himself (*a se* in Latin means “from himself”)

God, our Maker exists in an eternal, self-sustaining, necessary way. We necessarily age and die, because it is our present nature to do that; God necessarily continues forever unchanged, because it is His eternal nature to do that. This is one of many contrasts between creature and Creator.

God existed in perfect solitude in Eternity Past. He also existed in perfect self-sufficiency.
→ Creation, as magnificent as it is, adds nothing to His being.

Application – Just when we might start thinking we have God wired ... we might draw our hearts to **Job 36:26 – “Behold, God is exalted, and we do not know Him; The number of His years is unsearchable”**

Perfection in His **Glory**

Point – The root of Biblical Doxology (The study of God’s glory, giving God glory) lies in the eternal nature of the Trinity.

Proof – **John 17:5 – “And now, glorify Thou Me together with Thyself, Father, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.”**

Application – This week while traveling in Europe, I was reading a book by Francis Schaeffer

entitled "Genesis in Space and Time" from which this quote comes: *"If we are being fully scriptural, we do not praise [God] first because He saved us, but first because He is there and has always been there."*

Same as well-meaning but erroneous thinking of Christians that think God created us because He needed fellowship.

- He didn't create us because He needed anything
- He created us out of His eternal counsel for His own good pleasure, for a more full reflection of His glory, and for the love and promise that was made within the Triune members of the Trinity, of the one God that we serve.

This is the answer as to why things are the way they are, and this is the framework for our thankfulness and the framework for giving God glory. Unless we reach back into Eternity Past, before the beginning, thankfulness for salvation and glory ascribed to God become less meaningful than it could be because they are suspended in a vacuum.

2nd Revelation of Eternity Past God gives ...

2. Purpose

Point – Purpose -- History is simply the outworking of His story already written and planned in eternity.

Since the beginning of time, everything which has come to pass and which is presently unfolding is only the revealing of God's mind. It is that which He, from all eternity past, purposed or decreed to come to pass. We take comfort in this, we have joy from this.

Every **occurrence**, every **event**, good or bad, every **incident**, expected or unforeseen, every **circumstance**, favorable or unfavorable, were all decreed by God in Eternity Past.

Proof – **Eph 3:8-11 – v. 11 "This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord"**

The history and destiny of all things, animate or inanimate, were all decreed beforehand by God. Everything, whether it is the establishment of a nation, its culture, its language, people, population, its location on the earth, its destruction, were all decreed by God.

War, birth, death, troubles, seasons, weather, to the smallest detail and without exception were infallibly determined beforehand by God to come to pass. Nothing whatever exists or happens but that which God has decreed before the foundation of the world.

There was much in the mind of God throughout all Eternity Past. We know from Scripture there was:

- A. **His Will**
- B. **His Wisdom**
- C. **His Decree**

A. His Will

Proof – **Rev 4:11** – “Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed, and were created.”

B. His Wisdom

Proof – **Prov 8:22-26 (ESV)** – “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. ²³Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. ²⁴When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. ²⁵Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth, ²⁶before he had made the earth with its fields, or the first of the dust of the world.”

C. His Decree

When God Plans → He also Decrees (unfolds)...

- Whether Judgment on the Nations and Satan ...

Isa 14:24 – “The LORD of hosts has sworn saying, “Surely, just as I have intended so it has happened, and just as I have planned so it will stand”

- Or the Eternal Plan of Redemption ...

Acts 2:23 – “his Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.”

1 Pet 1:20 – “He was foreknown before the foundation of the world”

- this helps us to understand foreknowledge

Christ was hidden in the will of God Before He came out of the womb of the virgin in time. He was a Lamb slain in decree before He was slain on the cross.

Application – Full circle back to the perfection of His glory → to what end did God decree everything which comes to past? His own Glory.

Perfection, Purpose, ...

3rd Revelation of Eternity Past God gives ...

3. Promise

Point – God loved in Eternity Past. He loved before He created.

- The Father loved the Son.
- There was **Love** and out of this love a **Promise** was made.

Proof – **John 17:24** – “Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which You have given Me; for You

loved Me before the foundation of the world”

Application– Someone may ask the question, “Did God have to create?” No. God did not have to create to communicate, to love, or to receive glory. Because there already was the Trinity.

Out of this **Love** in Eternity Past, came a **Promise** in Eternity Past

Tit 1:2 – “**in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago** (Lit. – “before time began”)”

- Who was there before time began? Only the Trinity.
- God the Father gave God the Son a promise - a gift of a redeemed humanity

2 Tim 1:8-9 – “**Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity (Lit. – “before time began”)”**

Perfection, Purpose, Promise, ...

1 Pet 1:20 – “**He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you”**

- this eternal purpose is for the sake of the believer

4th Revelation of Eternity Past God gives ...

4. Election

Point – God put your name down in His **Book of Life** before the world began. God **elected** you in Eternity Past.

God’s eternal Plan of Redemption began in Eternity Past. Before time, before creation, before anybody existed. In the free and independent and sovereign **Will** of God, He set the plan in motion.

Proof – **Eph 1:3-6** – “**Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.”**

Rev 13:8 – “**all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”**

- "him" refers to the Antichrist

Rev 17:8 – “those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world”

- one object that was in Eternity Past - the Book of Life
- if you are a Christian, your name was written in that book!

Illustration – Beloved, we are not some debris and driftwood floating in a big river of time. God is not up in heaven with a divine fishing hook hoping to catch one or two of us now and then. God is not sitting up in heaven saying, “Boy, I hope some of these people will respond to the gospel and come along with me.”

Application– Simply put, God foreordains the eternal destiny of each of His creatures. Period.

CONCLUSION

A 17th century English author named Sir Thomas Browne wrote these words: “*The created world is but a small parenthesis in eternity.*”

- How are you going to spend Eternity Future? Will you be suffering the consequences of your sin forever separated from God in hell or rejoicing in the presence of Jesus Christ and all His saints from all time, forever and ever?
- How are you going to spend this 'parenthesis'?

Illustration: Picture a very long rope with one end going out the door and circling the entire world (eternity future) and on this rope there is a small section of red tape- about the size of my palm - that section is your life - and the other end of the rope goes around the world in the other direction (eternity past). This visual illustration begs the question: What is more important - the very small red section of the rope that represents your life or eternity past, knowing you have no impact on that, or eternity future? Our eternity future will be impacted by how we spend "that little section of red tape". We know this from Scripture. Certainly, whether we are in God's presence or not, but as believers, we are told that we will receive rewards in heaven for how we live in the here and now.

Recently we had an Elder's Meeting – praying for and looking over master list of attendees → less than 50% of the names are actively serving.

We understand we have a lot of new folks, but let me make a statement here.

If San Tan Bible is your church, there are 5 possibilities:

You are either

- 1) serving
- 2) brand new to our church
- 3) hurting and in need of care
- 4) sinning or
- 5) unsaved

Beloved, God wants you to be committed to a local church. That is part of God's eternity-prepared gift of your salvation - the local body.

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