

## **The Theory of Everything** Colossians 1:15-20

Our scripture reading for today is one of the most famous passages from the Apostle Paul. It is thought by many Biblical scholars to be a hymn that was sung in worship by the early Christians. Whatever its use may have been liturgically, this passage is clearly one of the most powerful statements about Christ ever made, words that uplift Christ and solidify his place in the universe. Read. Colossians 1:15-20. Pray.

We are right in the middle of awards season for motion pictures and so, for movie lovers, it is an exciting time of the year. Golden Globes;SAG Awards;Academy Awards. Who will win best actor? Who will win best actress? Which movie is the best? I must admit that I am frequently a nay-sayer when it comes to movies and Hollywood in general. You can call me a stick in the mud, if you'd like, but I often think that movies are too violent, too R-rated or simply too vapid for my taste. This current season of movies, however, is an exception. The movies out right now have astounded me with their quality and depth. Some have actually peaked my theological interest as well. So, for the next two weeks, Pastor Stu and I will discuss two movies currently in theaters, not to convince you to go and buy a ticket, but to see what theological gleanings we can get from the current crop of cinema.

My movie for today is called ***The Theory of Everything*** and is about the famous British physicist Dr. Stephen Hawking. It is a wonderful movie, brilliantly acted with the lead part played by Eddie Redmane in the role of Stephen Hawking. Redmane has already won the Golden Globe and the SAG Award for best actor for the part. He is nominated for an Oscar.

You may remember Stephen Hawking as the man in a wheelchair, head permanently tilted to the side, who can only speak with the help of a computerized voice machine. What you may not know is that he is brilliant and has done extraordinary work in the field of physics and cosmology in particular. Hawking authored several million selling books, telling ordinary people about space, time, and the origins of the universe, the most famous being ***A Brief History of Time***. This book is considered to be a classic, (it was on the New York Times bestseller list for 3 years) and it deals with the ultimate questions of the universe – Does the universe have a beginning? If it does, then what was its cause? What came before the universe? And what role, if any, does God have in all of this?

The movie, ***The Theory of Everything***, depicts Hawking's life while he was postulating his theories about the universe and writing this book. But, on the personal level, it adds a focus on his personal life – his family, his relationship with his first wife, Jane, and how their romance lasted through years of his devastating illness.

The movie begins with Hawking being diagnosed at age 21 with motor neuron disease or ALS, while he was earning his doctorate at Cambridge. He was given 2 years to live. Despite learning of his diagnosis, Jane stuck by him, married him and together they had 3 children. She was his care-giver for decades as he, little by little, lost all ability to function independently. Jane married him despite his illness and despite the fact that he was an avowed atheist and Jane was not. In one of their first conversations, he told her he was an atheist, and she said, "Oh really, well I'm Anglican," and she never wavered in her belief in God.

Now, I am certainly not a physicist or a scientist of any sort, but I will try to explain, in a nutshell, the gist of Hawking's work that is depicted in the film. He is a cosmologist, this means that he tries to create the marriage of space and time. His work is about origins. He works to "wind back the clock," if you will, to discover what happened at the beginning of time itself, when no human beings existed. The aim of his cosmological work is for **a complete description of the universe by means of a single theory**, a theory that explains how the universe changes with time, but also explains how it began. "The Theory of Everything" as it is called. Hawking believes in human endeavor and he truly thinks that, with enough human energy, input and determination, we will eventually find "The Theory of Everything."

Of course, scientifically speaking, human beings have figured out many important principles of the universe and have explained those principles through equations. Einstein's "Theory of Relativity" is one; Sir Isaac Newton's Law of Universal Gravitation; or every school child's nightmare, the Pythagorean Theorem. These theories, and hundreds of others, have helped human beings to understand the laws of nature and helped society to progress further and further.

What Hawking attempts to achieve, however, is the ultimate theory, showing his ultimate mastery over the universe itself. In fact, one British newspaper heralded him as "The Master of the Universe." Hawking believes that the beginning of time is at a singularity, a point of infinite density at which the laws of physics break down. Whether the singularity had a beginning or existed infinitely is another question that Hawking is currently working on. But, through something called "string theory," Hawking intends to go before this singularity, before time itself, and come up with a theory of the origins of all matter and all time. The movie brilliantly shows his quest to find the answer and the toll it takes on his family life. As of the release of the movie, however, The Theory of Everything has not been discovered, by Hawking or anyone else.

Now that we've heard about the movie and a very brief sketch of Hawking's work, let's put on our spectacles of faith, as I like to call them, and ask ourselves the question, "What does scripture and Christian faith in general have to say about The Theory of Everything?"

Our scripture passage for today from Colossians is direct and to the point. It tells us that our need as human beings to understand our origins cannot be done apart from God. The Apostle Paul writes:

***Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible . . . all things were created through him and for him. Christ himself is before all things and in him all things hold together. vv. 16-17.***

This is pretty clear, I must say. Paul tells us that when you are looking for the answer to "What happened at the beginning of all time?" you need to look for Christ, because he was there (*Christ himself is before all things*). When you are asking "How was the universe created and by whom?" you need to look for Christ, because he was there (*All things were created through him and for him*). When you are looking for that one equation that sums up the origins of the entire universe, you need to look for Christ, because he himself is the equation, the answer, and all of the work that goes between. Yes, scripture is very clear that neither time nor energy nor matter preceded Christ.

Over the years, Stephen Hawking has made various statements about God, including a sweeping observation that, viewing his research as a whole and his conclusion that the universe began as a singularity, we really have no need for God anymore. But I really think that, despite his extraordinary brilliance in his fields of expertise, Hawking simply doesn't grasp the essence of the Christian faith.

Far more than believing in a supreme being who lit the fuse at the beginning of creation and then stepped away, we Christians believe in a God who created and sustains the universe. God's creative power is seen in every flower that is perfectly arranged atom by atom to be a flower. God's creative power is seen every morning when the sun comes up and warms the earth with light and heat, but doesn't come too close to burn us all up with its intensity. God's creative power is seen in each and every human being, whose DNA is set in such a way that each one of us is unique, yet each person has a similar biological system that sustains life.

But far more than his creative powers is God's place in this universe as the sustainer of all life. Christians know that God sustains us by coming to us in the person of Jesus Christ, to talk to

us, love us and open the way to be with him eternally. Christ's life, death and resurrection is something that cannot be explained away by string theory.

And God is a personal God who comes to us in the form of Spirit and bonds with us in our hearts, becomes part of our every breath. Think of it this way, we are not here this morning because God lit the fuse at the beginning of time. We are here this morning because Christ has touched each and every one of us in some personal way. Christ has made himself known through the blessings we have, through answers to our prayers, through the way he touches our hearts when we need him most. Christ has come to each and every one of us and said, "I love you."

If Hawking thinks that he can explain that away, well he's a fool. For me personally, if he thinks that he can explain away the God who called me into ministry with a voice as clear as day, opened the doors for me to go to seminary and provide for my kids at the same time, equipped me with talents and gifts I never knew I had to use for his glory and the glory of his church, and touches my heart with answers to prayer on an ongoing basis, well then, Mr. Hawking is really not as smart as he thinks he is. Because a personal God is just that, personal, he loves and sustains each and very one of us personally.

At the very end of the movie, there is a scene where he is writing his book **A Brief History of Time**, and his wife Jane discovers that he has admitted in the book that certain questions like, "Why are we here?" and "What is our purpose as human beings?" cannot be answered by science alone. She grabs the papers as they come out of the printer, runs to him and says, "Do you really mean this?" He waits a few seconds and then in his robotic voice, he responds, "You're welcome." Maybe there's hope for Stephen Hawking yet.

Go see a movie this winter and tell me what you think, but bring your theological glasses with you, don't leave them on the coffee table and enjoy the show! Praise be to God. Amen.