



## “Glory in God’s Glory”<sup>1</sup>

### Romans 11:33-36

In last week’s sermon, Jeff said that the main idea of the verses were that **The surprise of God’s mercy leads us to humility and awe**. We see Paul calling his readers to humility and awe, but the passage today ramps up, and highlights, having *awe* in God. When Jeff read these verses last week, I was getting so excited to preach this text, and now I’m here!

These four verses are extremely important in understanding how we as humans should relate to God and to the Bible. Many people will think that studying the Bible is too confusing, dry and boring. When they hear the word “theology” or “doctrine,” they let their mind shut off until something more interesting comes up. I find that tragic, and it also reveals our sinfulness. In Romans 1, Paul says that humanity’s sinfulness is revealed in that we humans are born suppressing the truth about God – and therefore, we embrace lies. Sinfulness suppresses doctrine and theology.

Now, having said this, there are some people who communicate doctrine and theology in dry ways. And, I find that sad as well. This past week, I came across the following quote, “If the Bible’s not having an effect on your emotions, it’s because you have little faith in what it says” (John Piper). Maybe we can modify that and say, it’s either that you have little faith in what it says or you don’t know what it actually does say. The bible reveals to us that a **healthy theology leads to hearty worship of God**.

By the way, this isn’t a new concept. There’s an old catechism from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and the first question is, “What is the chief end of man?” The answer is, “To glorify God and enjoy him forever.” To glorify *and* enjoy. God is not some being that we are simply to know about. If you just like having all your doctrinal ducks in a row, but you’re affections are effected, you don’t really understand God.

Let me give a different illustration. Years ago, I was taking teens to a bible conference in Louisville, KY. While we were there, there was a break between sessions, and in that break, the guys wanted to go back to the room to catch some basketball games that were on. Now, as many of you know, I’m not a sport’s guy, but I went back to the room and watch the guys watch. There’s one guy in the group who is a very quiet guy. He speaks when you ask him specific questions. Other than that, he would be content to never speak. But in the midst of the game, his team made a basket, and he literally jumped up, yelled in excitement, walked across the room and went back to his seat. What happened to him?! The knowledge of basketball, his love for basketball and his team affected his affections. He couldn’t stay in his seat.

---

<sup>1</sup> This manuscript is still in the rough draft phase. I recommend you utilize these notes in conjunction to the sermon to gain greater insight and clarity.

You know, it's because of some people's love for sports that I've been intrigued to want to learn more about sports. This last year, Samuel and I decided to watch some Football because we have friends who like football. Their love has caused me to want to like it. And, guess what? We got into it some, and I'm looking forward to the upcoming season.

I give these illustrations to say that for us as humans, we recognize our love culminates and expresses itself in joy. And, when we see others joy, we want that joy – even if we don't understand everything there is to know. This is how it is designed with God. People who know the Bible, but have no joy, are a walking contradiction. And, people who have a lot of smiles, but don't know the Bible are a contradiction as well. Theology and Worship go hand-in-hand. And, this is what we see in this passage today.

So, please turn to Romans 11, and I'll read verses 33-36 after we pray [Fern Jepma, First Baptist of Holland, MacPhail-Fausseys].

---

*<sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>34</sup> "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" <sup>35</sup> "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" <sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. <sup>2</sup>*

---

Do you hear the excitement and worship of Paul here in these words? We have just concluded a confusing section in chapters 9-11, and you may not be feeling what Paul's feeling, but this expression here should awaken every Christian to their calling to worship the Lord. Paul's worship is contagious and if you're missing that joy, I pray that Paul's words here grab your heart and cause you to want to worship the Lord. I believe the main idea of these verses is: **Glorify in God's Glory.**

This is also miraculous that Paul could call people to worship the Lord. If you remember Romans 1, the greatest problem in humanity is detailed in verses 22-23, "**<sup>22</sup> Claiming to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.**"<sup>3</sup> Humanity looks at God's glory and puts God's glory either on par or less than the glory of the things around us. We have greater love for and ascribe greater worth to the things we can see, rather than to God. This leads to all types of sinful expressions, and Paul teaches us in Romans 1-3, that humanity is bound in their sinfulness. Therefore, we do not glorify God.

Now, you could say here, "Why is it so bad to not glory in God?" Well, 1) God is the Creator and he created all as an expression of his glory. He owns everything, and to treat the owner with contempt is not only rude, but brazenly sinful. 2) Our eternal good is wrapped up in his glory. Since God is the most glorious, to reject him means that we do not have eternal glory. We reject God to our eternal demise.

---

<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:33–36.

<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 1:22–23.

However, as Paul continues to write in Romans, he shows how God has designed a plan to rescue sinful humans so that they can actually glory in God's glory. By Jesus coming to this world, Jesus lived the perfect life we could never lived, and then Jesus took the punishment that sinners deserved. He appeased God's righteous standard, and now all who turn to Jesus are reconciled with God and granted the ability to grow in godliness. Meaning, we're able to glory in God's glory.

Now, in Romans 11, Paul praises God for his miraculously glorious plan to set people free to glory in God, and in these four verses, Paul gives us three big reasons *why* we should worship God. I hope these reasons encourage and compel you to greater joy-filled worship of God. I believe Paul wants to lead us all in worship here because the way he writes in these verses is more in 1<sup>st</sup> century hymn-type form. Paul's usage of a sequence of three's is noticeable, and then his "For's" at the beginning of verse 34 and then 36 gives us transitions. Paul's writing a hymn for the church to sing! Here are the reasons why God is worthy of our worship!

The first reason is that God is infinite/deep. The second, "humanity is infinite/limited," and the third reason is that God's glory is the supreme goal of all. So, let's get into the first reason why we should glory in God's glory.

### **1. God is infinite/"deep" (v. 33).**

Read verse 33 with me again: <sup>33</sup> Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>4</sup>

What is Paul praising God for here in this verse? God's depth. What does that mean? Well, I've given you the answer to that question already. The depth here is referencing God's infinitude. I think this is the highlight because the words riches, wisdom, and knowledge all described as deep. Then "unsearchable" and "inscrutable" are different ways of saying "depth."

Paul praises God for being deep. Have you ever said, "Oh, that's too deep for me" and you check yourself out of a conversation? Paul shows us that God's depth should be the very reason we're drawn in to God – not rejecting him. Yet, I find it very sad how many Christians express feeling guilty or less of a Christian because they don't understand "enough" (whatever "enough" means). They think that because they don't know, therefore, they're not spiritual enough.

Do you see what Paul is doing here. He's essentially saying that while he has explained a lot, there's an infinite depth that reveals to him that there's so much he doesn't know! As I hear these words of Paul, I think of the ocean. At least, as of around 15 years ago, only around 12% of the ocean floor has been studied. Eighty-eight percent of it is unknown. Then I think of the Mariana Trench. It has a greater depth than the height of Mt. Everest. Now, have you ever heard a person say, "Well, there's so much I don't know. It's over my head, *literally*. So, let's not study the ocean"? No. What they do know causes them to have greater excitement in learning more.

Or, I think of an iceberg. Have you ever seen pictures of the tip of the iceberg and then the rest of it underneath the water? It causes awe in us to think about the vastness of this iceberg. When we see the tip, we have respect for the rest of it!

---

<sup>4</sup> [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:33.

This is what Paul is getting at here. Some people might read these words and think, “Oh, God is infinite. We cannot fully understand him; so, we don’t need to understand him at all.” That’s ridiculous. The reason why Paul is praising God is because of the little he does know! And the little he knows, compels him to praise and want to know God more!

In this verse, Paul highlights certain aspects to God’s depth: the riches, the wisdom, and the knowledge of God. Some translations will say the riches of the wisdom and knowledge. However, I think the ESV gets it right by dividing these up into three aspects, and I’ll explain more later on this. But, let’s focus on each word for a moment.

What does Paul mean by “**riches?**” In verse 12 of this chapter, Paul writes, “<sup>12</sup> Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!”<sup>5</sup> What are the riches? I think we can go all the way back to Romans 2, where Paul talks about the “riches of his kindness and forbearance.” In 9:23, we read of God making known the riches of his glory on vessels of mercy. In 10:12, we read that the Lord bestows his riches on all who call on him. The riches of God is his innumerable kindnesses to those who turn to him. God’s riches are all that make us whole, complete, satisfied and growing in the Lord’s glory.

As we think of the Lord’s riches, it is only appropriate for us to think of their depth. Since God is infinite, unlimited and he has no needs whatsoever, and in him is eternal glory, what must the storehouses of his riches look like? I think of Jeff’s statement last week that God is a God of surprises. This is true with God’s riches. Think of how many times in Romans, Paul says “and more than that.” When he writes that, he is saying, “And there’s even more.” And there’s even more! Paul doesn’t even know all the “more” that is in the storehouse of God’s immeasurable kindnesses. But we do know some of the riches. Those of us who have turned from our sin and turned to Jesus, we have been declared righteous by the Judge of all Creation because of Jesus’ righteousness. We have been promised that we will grow in pursuing the Lord. We also do not fear any condemnation, but instead a grace that is greater than all our sin. We are also adopted into God’s family and we await a new world that will have no more sin and sorrow. In all of this, we know that God is working all things together for good for those who love him!

Do you see his richness towards us? Do you believe it? If so, you should be resting and rejoicing in God!

Let’s think now about the word “**wisdom.**” While the words wisdom and knowledge can be interchangeable, I think Paul is separating them here. Wisdom refers to all the knowledge being applied in the best possible way. Think about how Paul has written the book of Romans. There have been many questions and objections that Paul knows people raise to God and his salvation. And, at every turn, God has addressed us through Paul. Paul has shown that not only is it possible for God to work in the ways he teaches, but that God in fact does work this way, and it’s more glorious than we imagine. This wisdom of God is something none of us would have thought of or come up with. And, we who trust Jesus can see how this wisdom is truly the most glorious and impressive.

We look at Romans 3 and see how the human race is entirely sinful and if judged by the Law, we would be condemned. And then Paul says that the Law and Prophets pointed to Someone greater who could appease the wrath of God while also making sinners righteous in God’s sight. Therefore, God is both just and the justifier of all who have faith in Jesus. Just those verses in Romans should cause us to be amazed. First, we don’t deserve that. But second, it truly is the perfect way to save!

---

<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:12.

At every turn, when Paul answers objections, he shows that God is not simply more wise than humans, but that God is infinitely wise and absolutely perfect in all the applications of his knowledge. So, he is worthy to be trusted! Here is a God immeasurable in riches and infinite in wisdom. Can that be said of anything else? No! If you haven't trusted the Lord, why not today?

Sometimes people don't trust because they'll bring up some situation that's a struggle for them. Or they think God is missing something. These two points alone should lead us to trust him. But with the final word, knowledge, Paul encourages faith-filled praise.

**Knowledge.** This knowledge refers to God knowing absolutely everything. Theologians call this omniscience. There's nothing God doesn't know. When you read Romans, you begin to feel like God is holding a mirror up to you and also the human race, and we see ourselves in greater clarity. Is there anything God doesn't know? Is there anything he is unaware of? No.

But then, in Romans, Paul also uses a word related to knowledge in this book to emphasize God's knowledge even more. It's the word "foreknow." This has the idea of very personal knowledge of every specific child of God. So, Paul could be emphasizing this aspect as well. God has personal, relational knowledge of all. It's not simply that God's aware. God *knows*.

Paul moves on to say God's judgments are unsearchable: How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! <sup>6</sup> God's depth is defined as unsearchable and inscrutable. The word "judgment" and "ways" are probably descriptors of each other. God's judgments are revealed in his ways. His ways are revealed in his judgments. But Paul shows us that with God, there are points where we simply cannot cross in this life. God is the eternal Mariana trench.

For some, they think, "Well then what's the point of studying God?" Again, I would say that in general, you don't not study things because you don't know everything. You study them because they're glorious, fascinating, awesome, awe-inspiring, glorious. And, Paul isn't saying we can't know anything. He's simply saying that knowing our knowledge has limits actually causes us to dream about the rest of the iceberg of God! The lack of knowledge doesn't shame us. The lack of knowledge causes us to praise and worship him!

So, when you're diving into the Word of God and you get some things. Praise God. And when you're reading and saying, "I don't get this or that," say, "Praise God!" That doesn't mean that you can't grow in understanding, but it keeps a humble awe in us. Do you really want a God that you can define in every way? As one former pastor wrote, "**A God whose counsel we could fully grasp, whose ways we could fully discern, and whose nature we could fully explain in our human minds, would be a fairly limited "God" (Keller, p. 99).**

As we put all of this together, I think Paul's great emphasize in this praise is to highlight how glorious God is specifically in salvation. This is what we see in the book of Romans, up to chapter 12, and also primarily in chapters 9-11. Paul takes us through glorious highs and lows and then says, "Isn't God awesome?!" The Holy Spirit has given Paul wisdom to answer question after question, and we say, "I'm not the judge of God. God's ways are perfect! He is infinitely deep." This is the first reason to worship the Lord. The second reason is the flipside of this point:

---

<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:33.

## 2. Humanity is finite/limited (vv. 34-35).

Verses 34-35 say, “For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?” “Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”<sup>7</sup>

The main reason I believe that the ESV got it right in saying the riches of God’s riches, wisdom and knowledge is because of these verses. The phrases in verses 34-35 are in the opposite order. The “mind of the Lord” applies to God’s knowledge. Being a counselor applies to wisdom. Giving a gift and being repaid applies to riches. So, Paul is giving us an application to expand our joy in God so we can glory in his glory.

The first reason to glory in God’s glory is that God is infinite! His glory is infinite! The second is that we are limited. Now, this might sound interesting to us because in our culture, so many books and counseling methods seek to elevate us. Let’s make much of us and how great we are. And yet, in the midst of this culture, we have more depression and deaths by suicide than in decades past. There are many reasons behind all of this, and I don’t want to be overly simplistic or insensitive. Yet, the ultimate reason why there is hopelessness is because God is suppressed even more in our day than in decades past – and humans are seeking to elevate themselves. We’re called to humble ourselves under God, not elevate ourselves to God-like level. That’s the sin of Adam and Eve! The temptation wasn’t to usurp God, but to become *like* God. So, much counsel and teaching is to elevate us – and it’s not bringing the hope we’re looking for. Instead, I propose that we were created to find our joy outside of ourselves.

We can see this even in practical circumstances. I think the times I feel the most joy is when I’m lost in something greater. When I was at the badlands, I was focused on the enormity and beauty and even scariness of that area. When I am outside gazing at stars, I’m impressed by it’s vastness. When I was on Mt. Rainier, I wasn’t thinking of me. I was thinking of the bigness of the mountain and the even greater glory of God – causing me to be in awe. I wasn’t at the Badlands saying, “Hey everyone! Look at me, not this stuff.” I was amazed by the great glory. We were created for greater glory – and our joy will be found in the greater glory. Now, the thing about the Badlands, mountains, nature and stars is that those are all limited. As a result, our joy is limited in those things. But God is infinite! Therefore, our joy can be eternal in him.

So, it makes sense for Paul to say we should glory in God’s glory because we’re limited. By the way, verse 34 starts with the word “For,” which means Paul is giving a basis for verse 33. God’s ways are unsearchable and inscrutable because everyone else is limited! Now, look at the questions Paul brings to our attention. These questions put us into our places so that our rejoicing and awe can increase. So that we can quit navel-gazing and gaze at God’s glory.

**Who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?** This is a quotation from Isaiah 40:13. And, of course, two questions are here, and all the questions have an intended answer of “no one.” God’s knowledge is intimate, personal, complete. Now, the question comes to us. Do you have intimate, personal and complete knowledge of God’s mind? Does anyone? NO! God’s mind is unfathomable.

---

<sup>7</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:34–35.

Here again is where people say, “See. I’m just a loser spiritually. There’s so much I don’t know!” But Paul says that’s a cause for worship and awe of God. This should lead to humble dependence. In the context of Isaiah 40:13, God says these words to the Israelites regarding the second exodus from Babylon. God makes this promise, but the Israelites are doubting. They’re afraid because Babylon is powerful! But God assures them that he can do whatever he wants. All the nations are like a drop in the bucket. What’s Babylon to him? So, apply this verse to us and we see Paul’s teaching in Romans 9-11 (and maybe the entire book of Romans), and Paul is saying, “Does all this sound too good to be true?” Were you ever tempted to say, “But God, what about this or that?” Have you ever doubted God’s good intentions towards you? Listen to Isaiah 40:13 – God has no limits. There’s nothing too hard for him. Your knowledge is limited. God’s is infinite.

This then means your counsel is limited, too. When you tell God that you think your plan is better, you’re revealing that you don’t believe God is as glorious as he is. You think he a swimming pool, not the Mariana Trench. Yet, how often can we do this with God. I’ve done this so many times in my life. As most of you know, I’ve been dealing with chronic pain for almost two years now. Every day, basically every hour and minute. I’ve had a lot of conversations with God, asking why. A few months ago, I was talking with the other elders and I told them that I believe God was teaching me, but I still wasn’t grateful for it. Then, late April or early May, I was hit with gratitude. And, I’ve thanked God. That doesn’t mean I don’t want it to go. I would love that if it left and I was healed. But I’ve seen more of God’s wisdom represented in giving me chronic pain. He’s not the one with the problem. It’s me.

Paul compels us here to sing our lack of knowledge and wisdom. We don’t counsel God. We are limited. But God is infinite. Yet, I think there’s a little more that we could draw from this text. In 1 Corinthians 2:16, Paul cites Isaiah 40:13. And in that text, he says we have the mind of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul says that Jesus has become for us wisdom from God. So, when we read this rhetorical question of “who has known the mind of the Lord or been his counselor,” we can say “no one except Jesus.” Jesus is God in the flesh, who counsels us. He has become God’s wisdom in the flesh.

We see this in reading Romans. Over and over, Paul shows us that the answer to our greatest problems and greatest satisfaction is Jesus himself – the wisdom of God. But many may recoil at this. We still want to accuse God of some wrongdoing. Why has this or that thing happened, we say? We become embittered toward God, not really believing we’re limited and he is eternal.

Years ago, I was reading a book titled, “Who Made God?” The author is Emeritus Professor of Materials at the University of London as well as an international expert on the science of large molecules. After his name are the letters “BSc, PhD, DSc, FinstP, FIMMM, CEng. CPhys. This was a book over my head, where I was consistently asking a scientist mother-in-law to explain. But in this book, which was actually defending the reality of God, he wrote about the discovery of quantum physics. He said that before that point in time, physicists thought they knew all they could know. And then quantum physics was discovered. It changed perceptions dramatically. Things work “opposite” in that realm. What’s going on?! I bring this illustration up because even this natural study reveals to us our limited ability. We could wonder *why* things are functioning the way they are, but maybe there is a lot of knowledge we do not know yet. Which means, if we don’t have that knowledge, then we can’t exercise perfect wisdom.

But, we do know God is infinite and perfect in his knowledge and wisdom. And we who are limited in these, and trust Jesus, still receive the riches of his mercy! We must trust that there’s a “quantum” realm of God – and we simply won’t be able to make sense of it! But knowing that he knows should give us comfort.

Moving into verse 35, Paul asks the third question, **“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”** This is a quotation from Job 41:11. Job has struggled with his own life and what’s been going on, and God expresses his glory to Job. One of God’s responses is “who has given a gift to God that a person might be repaid by God?” In other words, is there any human being who initiates with God so that God has to pay them back?

So many people tend to think that God is passive in this world and just waiting for us to act. When people do good works or have good actions, then God has to respond with certain actions. By the way, this is more of a yin-yang approach to life, buddhist philosophy. God says to Job that his knowledge and wisdom is too limited.

If you think you can purchase God’s approval to your works and that you can get God in your debt for how you behave, then you are embracing your limited knowledge. And yet, we can all get caught in it right? We think, “God, I’ve been doing really well reading the Bible for a while, why did I lose my job?” Or, why are all these bad things happening when I’m not defying you. I think you’re against me! When we ask these questions, we think we can buy-out God or make God in our debt. God is *never* in humanity’s debt. Instead, we should humbly submit and be in awe of the God who knows all!

This is how Paul moves into the third point as to why we should glory in God’s glory:

### 3. **God’s glory is the supreme goal of all (v. 36).**

In verse 36, Paul says, <sup>36</sup>“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”<sup>8</sup>

The word “for” starts this verse, too. We are limited. Any knowledge, wisdom or riches we have come from God himself. “From,” “through” and “to” him are all things. Do you realize this? People who have believed that God simply made this world and walked away must have never really dealt with this verse. Our existence, our actions, our smarts, our everything comes from God, and God works in us to sustain us. And, ultimately, everything is intended to be “to” him. I believe this means that everything is to be for his glory. Or, as Paul writes next, “To him be glory forever.”

All comes from, through and to him. So, let me read a longer quote from another Christian, who wrote on this passage. He writes, **“God is the giver, not the recipient, of wisdom to human beings; God is the one who gives all things to us, not the one who receives benefits from human hands. Not only is God the source of all things and the means by which all things are accomplished, he is also the goal of all things. The purpose for which the world was created is God’s purpose. It is fitting, therefore, that the text ends with an acclamation of God’s glory”** (Schreiner, p. 638).

And, by the way, God’s glory is the supreme goal. Some may read Romans and think that the main point is God rescuing people from God’s just wrath against sinners. That’s not the main point. The main point goes back to Romans 1. We suppress the glory of God. When humans seek to ignore or suppress God’s glory, we dive into all sorts of sinful manifestations. Therefore, God and his glory is the aim of humanity, and all of creation.

---

<sup>8</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 11:36.

And God's glory is revealed in saving people from every tribe, nation and tongue. But not only that – God's glory is the aim of those who are rescued by him. If you profess that you have faith in Jesus, then your greatest aim isn't to see other people saved. Your greatest aim is to glory in God and to see others glory in God – which means their salvation! So, we see in these words that God has designed to bring maximal glory to himself through the salvation of the nations and the world.

And then Paul says "Amen." Why "Amen?" The word simply means "Truly" or "true." But it's a word of intensity and force! Paul is saying this is absolutely true and he rejoices with these truths! **I pray you can rejoice with these truths as well. God is infinite. Isn't that glorious? We are limited. Isn't God glorious? God is the supreme glory. Do you agree? Oh, then let's communicate about God with glorious joy. Let's glory in his glory, and let's pray that we would proclaim his glory until all the nations glory in his glory as well.**

#### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

1. Keller, Timothy. *Romans 1-7 For You*. The Good Book Company North America. 2016.
2. Moo, Douglas. *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1996.
3. Schreiner, Thomas. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic. 1998.