



## “Glory in God”<sup>1</sup>

### Romans 16:21-27

At the beginning of the musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*, the narrator sings, “We all dream a lot. Some are lucky, some are not. But if you think it, want it, dream it, then it’s real. You are what you feel. But all that I say, can be told another way, in the story of a boy whose dreams came true. And he could be you.”

This is how a lot of people tend to think about the Bible, and even life in general. Everything is about *us*. People can tend to communicate that the story of Joseph is not about how God is all-powerful and deserves our service – and that God is perfect, fulfilling his promises. It’s a story about a man who had dreams and we can be like him to and have all our dreams fulfilled. Now, I’m not here to just pick on Andrew Lloyd-Weber. I’m using this as an illustration to reveal what the apostle spoke from the beginning of the book of Romans. We human beings suppress the truth about God and we want to elevate ourselves and created things to “God-status.”

We do this, too, don’t we? We could read through the book of Romans and discover all the ways God works *for us*, and we could come to the end of the letter of Romans and simply say, “God is so great because he makes much of us.” But Paul isn’t not trying to teach us that. He didn’t say in Romans 1 that we’re sinful for suppressing God, but God loves suppressing himself! No. Paul’s point from the beginning is that all creation – and especially we humans – were made to glory in God. Our identity, hope, life, worth comes from being united with God and then glorying in his glory. As one pastor named John Piper has repeated continuously throughout the years: **God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.**

We should hear these words with delight and also conviction. God doesn’t want people who follow him as though it’s a drudgery. He is for our delight, but he’s not for strengthening our delight in the created things. He’s for our delight in HIM! And this is where conviction comes, too. Some worship God more because he makes much of them and their desires for greater stuff in this world. Is that you? You could be reading the letter to the Romans with this lens, and that’s dangerous because Paul comes to the end with a final doxology stating that to God belongs *all* the glory.

But you could be sitting here today, listening to that statement and you’re thinking, “What if I don’t desire God?” Or, “How do I desire God more?” Or, “I’m satisfied in so many other things than God.” Some of you, your response to these lethargic feelings is to say, “Oh well. Who cares.” Others of you, you might be thinking, “I really need to make myself feel desire.” But these responses often aren’t helpful.

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<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, this past week, before I was getting ready to study for this sermon, I really didn't want to study. In fact, I was standing in the Gathering Center, talking with David and Tracy, and I said, "Do I have to preach this Sunday?" Then I went to my office to study. I didn't want to, but there really wasn't any other option. Then I studied. A couple hours later, I was in David's office talking to him about the joyous gems I discovered in the text. I was overwhelmed. And then David reminded me of my attitude before studying and how God changed me.

You know, this has happened to me many times. In fact, most Sundays I don't want to get out of bed. I usually arrive in the church between 6:30 and 6:45. I don't often feel like, "Woohoo! Today's going to be a great day." But I get out of bed and trust God. And, oftentimes I'm strengthened. I love our church gatherings. I've grown closer to the Lord. I'm grateful. But it's not because I felt I had innate strength. It's also not because I necessarily *wanted* to be proactive in what I did. Instead, the Lord showed his faithfulness to me as I simply did what he wanted and trusted that he would work.

Now, as I say this, some of you might say, "Pastor Timothy, that's not very good of you to admit these things. You're a pastor. You're supposed to *want* spiritual things all the time. You are perfect, right?" Of course, I'm being facetious, but I think sometimes people can tend to think that pastors or people who are mature spiritually always have the right desires. Paul told us in Romans 7 that evil is *always* present with us. You feel it. I feel it. And yet, many times we can have greater fear of the evil – so much so we don't want to talk about it or admit it. But I think it's better to simply put it out there because as we boast in our weakness, we can boast all the more in God who graces us in the midst of our weakness. This is what happens to me almost every Sunday! God blesses me with joy in him – not because I naturally felt it, but because he's gracious. God blessed me this past week in studying this text – not because I wanted to study, but because he poured the truths into my heart and gave me greater desire for him.

My point in saying all of this is to answer the person who says, "What if I don't desire God?" Or, maybe to the person who says, "Well, Paul gloried in God because Paul was Paul, but look at me. I'm nothing." Listen, as we all admitted last week, we're all a mess – and the only way that we will glory in God and continue to do so until the day we die is if God works his miracle through us. And, I think the big point of these final verses of Paul is to call us to always **glory in our wise, strength-giving God**. Boast in him, not yourself. Trust him, not yourself. Take your weaknesses to him and find his strength. If the book of Romans has taught us anything, it's that God is all-powerful and gracious towards sinners so that they would glory in his glory. So, with this understanding, let's read the final seven verses of Romans in chapter 16:21-27:

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*<sup>21</sup> Timothy, my fellow worker, greets you; so do Lucius and Jason and Sosipater, my kinsmen. <sup>22</sup> I Tertius, who wrote this letter, greet you in the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you. <sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages <sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the*

*command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—<sup>27</sup> to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.<sup>2</sup>*

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Before Paul gets to his doxology, he mentions a few names of people who greet the Roman church. More than likely, people in the Roman church would have some awareness of these individuals. It'd be like if I went to a conference and saw a former church member there and they said, "Say hi to the people of Ventura." You'd know the person. So, in some way, these Romans have at least heard of these individuals. But why is it valuable to know these individuals? There are many reasons, but I want to focus on just one reason. In these names we see again the diversity within the body of Christ. But more specifically, we see a diversity of personality and abilities – and yet God works through all of them.

When we think about the big message of Romans – that being that humans are to glory in God – you can think, "How can I glory in God?" And you think about the apostle Paul and how passionate he seems to be. Or, you think about other people who you consider to be spiritual, and in your mind you think, "I'm not like that person." And you come up with some kind of answer. Some may say, "Well, if I had more money, I could be more effective." Or, others could say, "If I was married." Or, "If I was smarter." Or, "If I was just more bold like Paul."

I'm not going to highlight every name in this list, but I do want to say this. The names in this list include Jew, Gentile, unknown-to-us people, less wealthy and quite wealthy individuals. Look at Timothy, for example. Timothy is Paul's closest associate in ministry. Timothy joined Paul on his second missionary journey and went through the third one with Paul. Timothy is also said to be a co-author of six of Paul's New Testament books. Did you hear that? Six New Testament books were co-authored by Timothy! Yet, when we read 1 and 2 Timothy, Paul is encouraging Timothy to not be so nervous. "Take a little wine for your stomach's sake." Timothy was nervous. He needed to calm down. He did not have the seemingly bold personality of Paul. Yet, was Timothy used by the Lord? Yes!

I think of Tertius in verse 22. Tertius was what was called an amanuensis. In the ancient days, it was common to have someone write out what was dictated. Paul was dictating to Tertius. We don't know anything about him other than he wrote out Romans. But does God work through no-names?! Yes!

Then we have Gaius and Erastus. Gaius was so wealthy as to host the church. This could either mean he was hospitable and had Christians in his home often. Or, this could mean that he housed a church. I tend to think this means he had the house-church in that region. Can God use wealth for the glory of his name and for making disciples? Yes! Then Erastus. Erastus was a city treasurer.

By the way, I believe I mentioned last week or the week before that it's thought that Paul had Romans written from Corinth. And, some of the names here seem to affirm this – especially Erastus. There actually is a town square with Erastus' name etched in it, saying he paid for that square and that he had an official status in the city. Since Erastus was not a common name in that society, it makes it quite likely that the Erastus here is the Erastus who paid for that square. But listen, God can even work through city managers in their "secular" jobs!

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<sup>2</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 16:21–27.

Ventura, I mention all of this because whenever you say to yourself, “Well, I’m no Paul or Peter or James or ‘super spiritual person’,” I want you to think of these names. And, if you’re ever tempted to think, “Well, Ventura is just made up of certain people, I don’t fit in,” I want you to think of these names. These people come from varying backgrounds, varying social statuses, and yet they’re unified. No one is more valuable in God’s eyes than another. And they’re unified. How are they unified? Because of Christ! And the same is true for us here. You all have different backgrounds and social standings, yet we can be unified because of Jesus! Isn’t that amazing? And, isn’t it amazing that God promises to work through all of you who trust in Jesus? God doesn’t want you to be Paul. He wants to take you and empower you!

But God must be the one to do this. When you hear “Glory in our wise, strength-giving God,” the only way we will do this is if God does this as we continually look to Jesus. And this is what the doxology shows us. By the way, doxology means a praise that emphasizes God’s greatness. It’s God-focused, God-centered. The end of the book of Romans is not to highlight how great we are, but to say “How Great Thou Art, God!” That’s doxology. And what’s particularly interesting about this doxology is that Paul refers to many things he said at the beginning of the letter. Take a moment to look at these connections:

**“Who is able” (power), see 1:4 and 1:16. “Strengthen you” see 1:11. “[My] gospel” see 1:1, 9, 16; 2:26. “Revelation”/ “manifested” see 1:17; 3:21. “Prophetic writings” see 1:2; 3:21. “Obedience of faith” see 1:5. “All the nations (Gentiles)” see 1:5.** In a very concise praise of the eternal God, Paul brings the book of Romans back to the main point: God’s glory, God’s power, God’s wisdom among the nations!

So, let’s look at the doxology now and let’s be reminded how we will grow in glorying in God. You may be more of a Timothy or maybe you feel like a no-name, but whatever you are, if you’ve trusted in Jesus as your Savior, you are precious in God’s eyes and he promises to strengthen you!

### **1. God strengthens us with the gospel (25a).**

Let’s read the first part of verse 25 again: <sup>25</sup> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. . .<sup>3</sup>

In my own life, I’ve had many situations where I’ve feared that I was going to shipwreck my faith. One of my favorite songs we sing is, “He Will Hold Me Fast” because I know that if I was responsible to maintain my salvation, I would have lost it long ago. But God has taught me much through those painful seasons of doubt and fear. He’s taught me that my strengthening comes in Jesus and the gospel. Paul shows us here that God strengthens us through the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. Paul says that our strength is found day-by-day in the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. Now, actually, the Greek seems to indicate that the phrase “preaching of Jesus Christ” could simply be explaining the gospel. Meaning that we are strengthened through **the gospel, which consists in the preached message about Jesus Christ** (See Schreiner, p. 812).

When I was younger, I thought that the gospel was a message for people who didn’t trust Jesus. Once you trusted Jesus, you needed to move from the gospel. But here, Paul says that God strengthens believers day-by-day with the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. If you are a Christian, you should want to be strengthened. How will you be strengthened? Through the gospel! But I have a question for you. What is the gospel? I asked my children this question this past week, and it stumped them a little bit. I think one said that the Bible was the gospel, and I said “no.” What do you think the gospel is? I told

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<sup>3</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 16:25.

my children a concise definition. **The gospel is the message of Jesus and his death and resurrection for sinners like me.** Now, that's a basic definition, but we have to get things straight. The gospel is not, "Obey God and you will be blessed." That's Law. The gospel is not the whole Bible because some parts of the Bible is not good news for sinners. But the gospel is good news for sinners because the gospel is the message about Jesus, God the Son, coming to this earth and experiencing this cursed world, while also being persecuted by friends, family and the community. Not only that, he went all the way to death on the cross in order to take the just wrath of God in the place of sinners like me and you! What we deserve, Jesus took on himself. But why did he do this? In order to reconcile sinners with God. We were made to glory in God! We were made to know and love God. We were made for the greatest, supreme and eternal relationship ever to be conceived! And Jesus came to grant that!

But you could say, "How in the world am I going to be strengthened through the gospel?" A former pastor who lived in England, named Martyn Lloyd-Jones once wrote that Christians spend far too much time listening to themselves. Their voices say so many things to them throughout the day, but what Christians ought to do is preach to themselves. Declare to yourself what the truth is! Stop letting your voices in your own head dictate to you reality. Instead, preach the gospel to yourself. I've found this to be literally life-saving for me. When I've doubted God's love, I've gone back to the gospel. When I've struggled if God is just, I've gone back to the gospel. As I go through chronic physical pain, I've gone back to the gospel. When I want to know if there's a point in doing anything I do in a given day – whether seemingly large or small – I go back to the gospel. If I doubt God hears me, I go to the gospel. Literally, the gospel answers everything. And, if you say, "How?!" Well, that's a sermon for another time, but let me just say this, "Take God at his word and immerse yourself in the gospel. Preach, preach, preach, preach." And if you don't feel like it's doing anything, keep preaching it to yourself. Defy the voices simply talking to you and preach to your mind the life-giving, strengthening gospel message. You will *not* be strengthened without it.

Oh, and by the way, in this doxology, when Paul says "to him who is able to strengthen you," there's three other things I want you to see here. One, the word "able" is actually the word for "power." It's the same word for power in Romans 1:16. The gospel is the *power* of God unto salvation. God empowers us through the powerful gospel! Second, if you think, "But I'm so weak. I can't do this or that," just remember it's not about how powerful you are, it's about how powerful God is! Is God all-powerful? Ok then. Stop making excuses. Finally, for God to strengthen you means you are weak. You don't strengthen something that doesn't need help. There are so many Christians who think they're disqualified because they see their weaknesses and sins. Why is that disqualifying? My sin qualified me for salvation! And, recognizing and confessing my sins brought me to the throne of grace! The same is true for us today! We will glory in the gospel all the more when we are in the light with our sins! And, amazingly God will actually grow us as we are transparent and clinging to Christ in the gospel!

No wonder Paul says we are to glory in God! He maximizes his faithfulness and power in and through our weakness! He promises to grow us! Praise him. Paul moves on to further explain God's great strength and encourages us to glory in God because:

## 2. **God has disclosed the gospel (25b-26a).**

Let's start reading at the end of verse 25: according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages<sup>26</sup> but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations. . .<sup>4</sup>

Paul is saying that the gospel of Jesus is according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret. Wait a second. How can you have a revelation that's also a secret? If I say, "I've received a revelation," I would tend to mean that I've been given something that's been revealed. But Paul says that it was revealed as a secret. What? Well, I think we can understand the phrase "hindsight is 20/20," right? We can go through things that we didn't fully understand, but once a certain situation happened, we started to put things together and we say, "WOW! How did I miss that?" Or, "I should have known." That's how it was in the Old Testament. There are myriads of prophecies regarding the good news of the Messiah, pointing directly at Jesus. There are myriads of prophecies talking about God drawing all nations to himself, not just Israel. However, Israel didn't understand. But once Jesus came to this world, the Old Testament makes much more sense!

The reason Paul brings this up is to show us the absolute sovereignty and wisdom of God. God decided to keep people from understanding this fully and then God decided when it was to be the best time to reveal it. And, think about this Ventura, God chose for us to live in the time period after Jesus! We don't live in the days of mystery. We live in the days of disclosure! We are part of the "all nations," and we have heard the gospel and many of us in this room have turned from our sinfulness and turned to Jesus! So, Paul says we are to praise our all-sovereign and wise God who has stewarded this message faithfully and given it to us!

Oh, and by the way, if God has given you the message, then you can't be like the person who says, "Well, I know that God has saved me, but I'm not Paul." No, you're not Paul, but you are dearly loved by God and have been adopted into his family! Do you know God loves you eternally? Praise God for his wisdom! And, not only did God send his message to us, but finally,

### 3. He has commanded the gospel to bring about obedience (26b).

Let's continue in verse 26: to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith. . .<sup>5</sup>

Some people talk of salvation as though God's only intent is to get people to not go to Hell. The horror of Hell is not flames – it's being starved of God's grace and feasting on God's wrath. The problem of Hell is that in Hell there's no hope of a good relationship with God. You are forever his enemy. Which means that the glories of Heaven is not simply a crystal sea, streets of gold and a mansion. The glories of Heaven is feasting on and resting in God's eternal grace.

This grace empowers us to glory in God's glory – and to live for his glory for all eternity. I bring this up because Paul says here that the gospel strengthens us in our daily living. God has sent this gospel. And the purpose of sending us the gospel is to bring about the obedience of faith. This phrase is used in Romans 1:5, and I think it has a two-fold meaning. First, it refers to God counting faith as obedience. None of our works can save us. Faith is the only action that really is an admission that there's no action

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<sup>4</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 16:25–26.

<sup>5</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 16:26.

that can save us – not even our faith can save us. So, faith is dependence on Jesus, looking to him alone for rescue – and like Abraham, God counts that faith as righteousness. But this phrase “obedience of faith” also is probably referring to obedience that flows from faith. Meaning that if we have faith in God, it’s going to lead to obeying him.

Listen, if we really are rehearsing the gospel and we are believing the truths about God that the gospel teaches us, we can’t sit back and not care about following God. The God who justly could send all of us to eternity in Hell has reconciled with him and has promised to grow us in knowing Him – and someday in eternity future we will say that all the trials of this life aren’t even worth comparing to the glories that will be revealed! If we are rehearsing these truths, God will strengthen us to obey.

So, hear Paul’s words here. God has promised to grow you in obedience. Therefore, a Christian who thinks obedience doesn’t matter isn’t living as a Christian. They’re living against their identity. And they’re living against this identity either because they aren’t really trusting Jesus in the first place or they’re not rehearsing the gospel and finding strength through the gospel of grace.

But, good news, Christian! Paul tells us we ought to praise God because he sent the message of the gospel out to the world in order to bring about the obedience of faith. Meaning, God is ultimately in charge of our salvation and our growth in godliness. He will hold us fast! Therefore, glory in him. Praise him!

Do you see the love, power and wisdom of God in these words? The final words of Romans are found in verse 27: <sup>27</sup>to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. . . .<sup>6</sup> God is alone wise. And to him, not us, be eternal glory through Jesus Christ. Because of Jesus I can glory in God’s glory.

Now, I know some people might say, “You’re saying that the whole point in life is to glory in God?” To you, that might sound crazy or boring. But we all glory in things. You might glory in money or a big house or having a nice car or rest or food or you-name-something. But do those things ever give lasting satisfaction? No. God does. He’s the Eternal One – and what amazes me is that this Eternal Cosmic King has decided to reach into my life and raise me out of my pathetic existence of finding my meaning from things around me, and he raised me up to eternal life, reconciliation with him. And so, he has set me free to glory in his glory. And you know what I’ve discovered? The book of Romans teaches us that when we glory in his glory, we find our fulfillment because we were made for him. And, in glorifying him, I grow in fighting against sin and in obeying him. The obedience of faith is the obedience of faith that grows as I exercise faith. And this obedience is not a declaration of independence. It’s the declaration of dependence. I’m weak, but he is strong! Praise God! He gives us strength through his amazing wisdom in the gospel of Jesus.

To God, the wise one who gave this message in secrecy and then disclosed it and then send it around the world. He spoke and when he spoke it, it went forward. And in sending it out, he has saved people throughout the world and throughout time periods! And, in saving them, he’s promised to strengthen them as they continue to confess their weakness. To him be the glory!

So, Ventura, **through Jesus Christ and his gospel message, glory in God’s glory. Preach the gospel to yourself and believe that he takes people from various backgrounds, various strengths and**

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<sup>6</sup> [\*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version\*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ro 16:27.

**weaknesses. He then unites us together so that his glory might be savored and known among another generation. Therefore, may we be a people pursuing Jesus together; exalting God, edifying the church and evangelizing the world. Let us glory in his glory!**

And before we move to communion this morning, I want to give you the opportunity to glory in God. I'm going to ask that you close your eyes and as you have something on your mind, say a one sentence praise to God. Why do you praise him? Why do you glory in him? We will take a few minutes for you to say, "God, I glory in you because. . ."

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