

# Lost in Wonder, Love and Praise

## Romans 11:33-36

The last stanza of Charles Wesley's great hymn of praise, *Love Divine All Loves Excelling* ends this way,

*Finish, then, thy new creation;  
pure and spotless let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation  
perfectly restored in thee:  
changed from glory into glory,  
till in heaven we take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee,  
lost in wonder, love and praise.*

Wesley pictures us glorified in heaven worshipping God before His throne. When we see the Lord in all His glory we will surely glorify Him in perfect worship. But what about now?

Here we are this morning, still on earth, but like that great coming day, we gathered to worship. We have just sung, prayed, and read Scripture together to help do that. We intentionally set aside time each Sunday to gather in this place to worship God through Jesus Christ. Yet true spiritual worship does not automatically happen because we participate in the elements of worship each week.

Unless we contemplate God as He is, as He has revealed Himself through Scripture and ultimately, in His Son and by His Spirit, we will only go through the motions of worship without worshipping. We may sing, pray, hear the Word, and even add the voice of "Amen," yet fail to worship if we fail to contemplate God. When have you contemplated such great thoughts of God that you have been lost in wonder, love and praise?

Today we complete our 18 month journey through Romans 1-11. Paul has expounded to us the gospel of Jesus Christ where God saves sinners by grace through faith in His Son Jesus Christ and makes them into children of God. In Romans 1-3 we've seen the terribly sinful condition of our hearts—and the hearts of all humanity—; in Romans 3:20-5:21 we have seen the great work of Christ on the cross to provide a righteousness and a sacrifice so that we could be justified by faith alone apart from works of the law; in Romans 6-8 we've seen the mighty sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to conquer sin and make us secure in the love of Christ; and finally we have seen the great defense of God's sovereign grace and promise-keeping faithfulness in Romans 9-11 in His great plan to save both Jews and Gentiles through faith in Christ.

For eleven chapters Paul has been sharing the power of the gospel. Step by step he has shown God's way of putting sinners right with Himself, how Christ died for our sins and was raised for our justification, how we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, how the Christian life is lived not under the law but in the Spirit, and, of course, how God plans to incorporate the fullness of Israel and the Gentiles into His kingdom. Paul has written to us deep truth from the mind of God. The Holy Spirit of truth was teaching us theology. Much of this truth has been so deep and awe inspiring that we could only stand at the edge and get a distant glimpse of the vastness and beauty of God's revelation.

In chapter 12 we turn the corner in our study of Romans. In contrast to the theological nature of chapters 1-11, the next few chapters are highly practical. Paul will exhort us to daily live out in our lives the truth we have learned. Chapters 12-15 focus on morality, on Christians doing the right things. But as John Piper points out, *"Morality in the Christian life is not simply the willpower to do right things, because God has the authority to command them. Christian morality is the overflow of worshipping the sovereign, merciful God. Christian life is the fruit of a mind and heart transformed by seeing and savoring the all-sufficiency and sovereignty and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ."*

Maybe that is why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul at the end of chapter 11 to break out into awe inspired worship. As Paul contemplated how God designed and carried out His plan for salvation history, the Spirit move him to wonder, love, and praise. I pray that as we contemplate the greatness and worthiness of God today, that we would also be lost in wonder, love, and praise because only when our minds are transformed by devotion in true worship will we be able to know and do the will of God. Living the truth of the bible is the overflow of worshipping the God of the bible.

So for a few moments today let's think great thoughts about our great God. Listen to how Paul expresses his worship in Roman 11:33-36:

**33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**

**34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?"**

**35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"**

**36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.**

Today I want us to focus our thoughts on worshipping God. So my outline is in three parts. Three ways we worship God.

Worship God by:

1. Contemplating His wisdom and knowledge.
2. Contemplating His great sufficiency.
3. Contemplating His glory in all things.

First we worship God by,

### **1. Contemplating His riches, wisdom and knowledge. (11:33)**

Paul begins his expression of praise in verse 33 with an exclamation, "Oh, the depth!"

As Paul contemplates God and the riches of His wisdom and knowledge it's like he sees something yet he realizes that he only sees the surface of what is truly present. He knows that he has seen wondrous things about God and His salvation. Paul has expounded on these great truths chapters 1-11 of Romans. Yet he realizes that his finite mind can grasp only so much of the infinite realities of our God. "Oh, the depths!" He knows that he cannot understand it all—that will take all eternity!

Maybe you've stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon and peered into the bottom and exclaimed, "Oh, the depth!" Or you stood and looked at the surface of the ocean in all its wide expanse, but you could not even imagine how deep it is. You could sink Mt.

Everest in the deepest part of the ocean and it would still be over a mile below the surface. It's hard to fathom something that deep.

What “depths” of God does Paul contemplate? He identifies three attributes of God that should cause us to praise Him.

### **A. God's riches**

Although it could be that the word “riches” in verse 33 simply describes what Paul saw in God's wisdom and knowledge, Paul has most often uses “riches” in Romans to refer to the grace of God in Christ.

(Romans 2:4 NKJV) 4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

(Romans 9:23 NKJV) 23 and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory,

(Romans 11:12 NKJV) 12 Now if their fall [is] riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness!

Do you notice a common denominator? “Riches” focuses on the grace of God shown in His saving work through Jesus Christ. When Paul thought about the gospel he proclaimed in chapters 1-11. When he contemplated Jesus Christ's redemptive mission and the Father sending the Son to do that work, he saw it as “riches” beyond anything held by the world.

Paul used “riches” to describe God's grace in Christ also in Ephesians.

(Ephesians 1:7-8 NKJV) 7 In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace 8 which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence,

In that verse we see the same three elements as Romans 11:33: riches, wisdom, and knowledge.

(Ephesians 2:7 NKJV) 7 that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in [His] kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

(Ephesians 3:8 NKJV) 8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,

In that verse we see God's riches are not just riches that Christ gives, but the riches that Christ is. As Paul says in Colossians

(Colossians 1:27 NKJV) 27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Christ Himself is our greatest Treasure. He Himself is the riches of the glory of God.

Next we see that God riches are expressed His wisdom and knowledge:

### **B. God's wisdom**

Look at verse 33 again, **Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!**

Wisdom has to do with action. It is not just smartness but rather it is the insight to take the right actions in a given situation. God's wisdom answers the question of how? How will You deliver Your creation from the effects of the fall? How will You get glory out of

such a sinful world? How will You rescue those You elected before the foundation of the world? How will You satisfy Your eternal justice and yet still have a people for Yourself? How will You accomplish the work of Your kingdom when the world has rejected Your Son? How will You bring the nations together in worship of Your name and as a display of Your glory?

As we have studied through Romans we have stretched our brains trying to figure out God's wisdom, how God does all this saving work. The answer to all of this is simple and profound. In Colossians 2 Paul says that it is in Christ **in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge** (Colossians 2:3).

The wisdom of God is finally Jesus Christ Himself, crucified and risen and reigning — a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are being called the power of God and the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). Christ Jesus is God's way, God's truth, and God's life. He is the wise end and goal of all things.

Thirdly we praise God for His knowledge.

### **C. God's knowledge**

God's knowledge is unfathomably deep. He knows all recorded facts — all the facts stored in all the computers and all the books in all the libraries in the world. But vastly more than that, he knows all events at the macro level — all that happens on earth and in the atmosphere and in all the farthest reaches of space in every galaxy and star and planet. And all events at the micro level — all that happens in molecules and atoms and electrons and protons and neutrons and quarks. He knows all their movements and every location and every condition of every particle of the universe at every nano-second of time. And he knows all events that happen in human minds and wills — all volitional and emotional and spiritual events — all thoughts and choices and feelings.

And that includes past, present, and future. He knows every event that has ever happened and ever will happen at every level of existence: physical, mental, volitional. And he knows how all facts and all events, of every kind, relate to each other and affect each other. When one event happens, he not only sees it, but he sees the eternal chain of effects that flow from it and from all the billions of events that are unleashed by every other event. He knows all this without the slightest strain on his mind. That is what it means to be God.

And God's unfathomable knowledge is also in Christ Jesus. All facts and events arise from him. All facts and events are sustained by him. All facts and events point to him. He is the meaning of all knowledge. There is no true knowledge that is not related to Christ. Every thought in a human mind, or in the mind of a demon, about any fact or any event in the world, that is not truly connected to Christ, is a thought in rebellion against the Truth and against God. There is no true knowledge apart from Christ.

How deep are the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God? They are beyond our comprehension as Paul says in the second half of verse 33, **How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!**

God is so deep that we can only go down a few feet and peer into eternity. Now, consider what Paul is doing. He looks with praise to God from two angles. On one hand, he praises God for what he has seen and what he has written of the saving work of God through Christ. He worships God for what God has revealed to Him.

But on the other hand, he worships and praises God for what he cannot see of God and what he cannot know of His judgments and ways. Worship is not just what we know about God but it is also recognizing that there is much more to Him that we do not know and cannot fathom.

What should be our response? The same worship response that Paul had. "Oh the depths!" Our response to the depth of God should cause us to say, "Wow!"

## 2. Contemplating His great sufficiency (11:34-35)

Paul goes back to two well-known passages from the Old Testament to ask questions leading to clearer understanding of God's character and ways. The first is from Isaiah 40 and the second from Job 35.

Verse 34, **"For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?"** Answer: Nobody has known his mind in such a way as to be his counselor. We know something of his mind because of revelation. Paul has given us 11 chapters of the mind of God. We are meant to understand it. But no one knows the mind of God in a way that can become his counselor.

Did God ever ask your advice before making a divine decision? How silly, and yet many times we find ourselves trying to tell God what He needs to do as though He needs our counsel. In Isaiah 40, the prophet launches into one of the most majestic passages in God's Word, describing God's handiwork in creation and how small mankind and the world is compared to Him.

Then in verse 35 he asks like Job did, **"Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?"** The answer again must be: No one. Since all is from God and through God, He owns all things and we can never give Him anything that is not already His. Which means that we can never put God in our debt. There is absolutely no negotiating with God. We have no bargaining position. Every breath we take is a gift. Every virtue we perform is grace. In Acts 17 Paul preaches about God's sufficiency saying, **"Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things."** (Acts 17:25).

As Paul has already set forth here in Romans, God is not obligated to us in any way. That's why salvation is all of grace and never payback for acts of merit. He is the only being in the universe that is self-sufficient.

How does this affect our worship? Pause to consider what you owe God. If "everything" does not come to mind, then think again. Now, contemplate how God owes nothing to anyone; no one holds Him in debt. Yet this same God has given freely to you! Can you sit back and be bored? Our response should be **wonder!** How great is our God!

## 3. Contemplating His Glory (11:36).

Paul concludes his praise in verse 36 by summing up everything in relation to God. He says, **For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things.**

God is the foundation of every detail in our lives and the universe. Everything is of Him, or from Him. Abraham Kuyper writes: *"There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, 'Mine!'"*

God is also how the universe and all within it functions. Everything is through Him. I love what Tony Evans says: *"Everything is either caused by God or allowed by God, and there is no third category."*

God is also the grand purpose of everything in existence. Everything is to Him. He is the goal of everything that exists.

Three little prepositions take us from the origin of all things in God, to the sustaining of all things by God, and finally to the purpose for all things existing for His glory. Everything comes from Him, everything continues by Him and everything finds its ultimate purpose in Him. Whether we see it or not, whether scientists have discovered it or not, whether we understand it or not—everything has its existence in the Lord; and everything has its ultimate purpose for His glory.

As verse 36b says, **“to whom be glory forever. Amen.”**

These few verses at the end of Romans 11 have summed up for us our response to God. Our position in Christ should lead to praise which expresses itself in proper practice. The study of theology must always lead to an explosive praise of doxology, where we say, **Wow!** That then leads us to **wonder**, which will lead us to a lifestyle of **worship**. Living for God a life of wonder, love, and praise.