

# God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Okay, so reading from Romans 11, 33 to 36, and if you do have a Bible at the back, it's on page 947. O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.

For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counsellor, who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.

Amen. Okay, we're beginning a new sermon series this week. We're actually looking at theology, looking at particular words that are actually significant in terms of our theology, understanding life, the universe and everything through God's eyes.

And so today we're actually looking at God himself. I didn't know how to summarise this for Matt.

Once you start opening up the subject of God, it gets really big on you very quickly.

So this talk will be about God. And that passage that we've just heard is a doxology that is like an exclamation, a mini psalm or something like, maybe is suitable for your thinking.

[ 1 : 23 ] Mini psalm or a poem, exclamation of who God is. And to get us kind of into the mode of where Paul was at in his own mindset when he actually wrote this and published it for the Romans initially, let's try a little exercise.

What I want you to do in a moment, not just yet, but is turn to your neighbour and share with them an event in your life where you were just blown away by something.

It could be an experience. It could be something you saw. It could be like climbing to a mountaintop in the view. It could be holding your first child after it was born.

It could be a, well, there's no right answer to this, but just one of those moments where you just were full of awe and amazement at all that life has to offer.

And perhaps even one of those moments where you were so full of awe and amazement of what life has to offer that you felt really small within it and yet at the same time full.

[ 2 : 28 ] So if you could just turn to your friends now and just share, just for a few moments, just share one of those experiences that you've had. I don't know what you've actually shared with each other at this particular point.

Like I said, there's no wrong answer here. What we're wanting to do, though, is just enter into that space that Paul was in his head where he was thinking about a particularly amazing revelation and experience.

And this is where he was at. So for me, for example, I would have shared perhaps the time I held my first child just after it was born. The first one, because as you know, if you've had more than one, the second and third aren't as eventful.

So the first child. And I remember holding that baby, actually holding the baby before Joe because, no, no, I won't go into the details. Anyway, holding the baby and just kind of thinking, wow, look what we've done.

I know that we was the wrong word very quickly because when I looked at Joe's face, I think she was kind of thinking, yeah, it wasn't 50-50. It wasn't even 60-40 what's just happened here. Okay, so look what you've done.

[ 3 : 35 ] You've produced this beautiful baby. And you just think, wow, how could you do this, Joe? You can't even bake a cake and yet you've made this beautiful baby.

Was that too harsh? I do the desserts in our family. Joe does the main courses and that's the only reason we've actually survived without descending into diabetes.

But, yeah, but, you know, there's these moments in life where you just are overawed by the experience that you've had. And so overawed that, like I said at the beginning, at the same time you

feel big, full of the experience, and yet so small in the context of everything that's going on in the world.

What I want to suggest to you here is that those four short verses that were just read out are Paul's response from being in that mode.

And the reason that he is so full of awe at this particular point is because he's had the gospel. He's laid the gospel out in all its fullness before the Romans. He's written it all down.

[ 4 : 43 ] And as he's written it down, he's just gotten to the end point of it and been overwhelmed by the scope of it all. The fact that the Father who superintended over this plan from before the beginning of time.

The Son, our Creator and our Judge, who set aside his glory to contribute his very life to this plan. The Spirit dwelling within us even now, awakening us to the inexhaustible love of God.

Growing us in an appreciation of God's love. And keeping us safe and secure until that Son returns to claim us as his own.

Paul is bursting with the joy of knowing this love. Of being caught up in this plan. And at the same time, as you can see from these four verses that spring from this joy, he feels dwarfed by the God whose plan it is.

He is overwhelmed by it. He feels so small within the vastness of the gospel. Specifically, he's overwhelmed by the God who orchestrated it. A plan that spans the rise and fall and rise again of the universe.

[ 5 : 59 ] The plan that spans nations and cultures and generations and languages. The plan that spans insurmountable obstacles and broken relationships. Who is this God?

What kind of God is this? He goes on and says this in verse 33. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. See where he starts there. The riches of God.

Now, riches we know can be used of wealth. But in Greek thought, it can also be used of more the concept of who you are as a person. The fullness or completeness of character. And that's what we're seeing here.

That God is a God who doesn't need anything. Everything flows from him. And it's a deep, unfathomable richness. Consider who God is in his completeness.

[ 6 : 59 ] He is the great I am. He knows who he is. He is secure in who he is. He doesn't worry about the fact that the likes tally has been taken off his Instagram account.

God isn't trying to work out what his identity is like we are. He doesn't wonder about his place in the world. He doesn't struggle with insecurity or anxiety or any other form of existential angst.

Consider who he is and the richness of his being. Consider the Trinity. Now, this isn't all the talk is going to be about. And I'm already scratching on a subject that makes our brains ache when we think about it, doesn't it?

But think about it just for a moment. Three persons, one God. God is eternally Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

I've talked about our sense of identity within ourselves. But what about that identity as it's expressed within the context of community? You know what it feels like to be lonely, don't you?

[ 8 : 09 ] You know what it feels like to be surrounded by people and yet feel like there's no one there who you connect with. Who you can share your life with, the joys and the sorrows. You know that sense of longing for companionship.

God doesn't struggle for a sense of belonging. Just like he doesn't struggle for a sense of identity. Because God is never lonely.

He is always experiencing and always expressing that deep sense of connection that we long for. Endless, deep and perfect devotion exists within him.

He doesn't need to connect. He is so full of the richness of perfect relationship that he overflows with a desire to reach out and love us.

We can't know the fullness of God without knowing the truth of the Trinity. We can't comprehend the richness of God without seeing how the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit engage in perfect, loving, unbroken community.

[ 9 : 19 ] We can't know the Trinity.

We can't know the Trinity. We can't know the Trinity. Effortless, self-giving community. And this rich God is wise beyond measure, we discover in these verses. Paul goes on to use the descriptors of knowledge and wisdom.

Now, knowledge is what there is to be known about ourselves, each other, the world around us, everything. And what we find here is that God is rich, deep.

The depth of his knowledge is unfathomable. He has all the information. There is nothing missing in his calculations, nothing deficient in his plans because he knows everything.

That's what knowledge is about. But wisdom, now wisdom is related to knowledge and we know it's not the same as knowledge, don't we? Wisdom is the application of all of that knowledge to life or achieving an outcome.

[10:42] And you know the difference. You see, we all know somebody who actually has a brain like the size of a planet. They know so much and yet they can't seem to change a light bulb.

Some people know so much but it's practically useless knowledge. There's a vast trove of knowledge but there's very little sense in that person of how to apply it to everyday life.

Well, what we're finding here is that God is not deficient in either knowledge or wisdom. He is rich in both. And these are truths that we teach our children.

There's a song, Our God is a Big, Big God. Our God is a Big, Big God. I've got to keep going, sorry. Our God is a Big, Big God and he holds us in his hands. You know one of the verses to this?

And he's known me and he's loved me since before the world began. How wonderful to be a part of God's amazing plan. That's songs we get our children to sing.

[11:49] But do we truly digest it ourselves? The same sentiment that's behind that song is behind Paul's exclamation here.

What kind of God is this?

Those rebels you can read about in chapter 1, the people who turn their back will flee on God.

That's us. The lawbreakers described in chapters 2 and 3, which is everyone, that's us.

Everyone includes us. The judgment described at the end of chapter 3 is right. The punishment we could not survive is coming our way.

And then God the Father sent the Son to rescue us. God the Son became a man and rescued us by taking our punishment for us. God the Holy Spirit awakened us to the truth of this good news and even now holds us safe within it.

[12:55] God the God who made us.

Like I'm here on merit or is like, as opposed to you, is like saying that I'm actually closer to being in outer space at the moment than you are. I've climbed those few steps and, you know, I'm an astral now.

It's ridiculous, isn't it? We're not here on merit. And in fact, as Paul points out in another letter, which he sent to the Corinthians, God tends to choose people and the people who least deserve it. It's almost like he goes around and makes a point of picking losers. That's us. Just to teach us how wrong-headed we are in our thinking.

To turn the glory back to him. We would never have come up with this gospel. Grace? God was loving while we were hating?

[14:15] Not a chance. God chose people like us.

God chose God. Just in mal ■■■■.■■■ ■■■ We actually rail against God because of his ways.

This God, this perfect God, this God beyond questioning. We wrestle with him day and night, kind of like Jacob did, for a blessing that we've already been freely given by God.

So Paul issues us with a couple of challenges in the next verses. It's a challenge drawn from Old Testament scripture. So you see the two verses with question marks in the middle here, verses 34 and 35 we're going to turn to.

And each of these points can be traced back to the story of Job. And you can look up the book of Job later. It's a fairly long book, but these verses actually come from it.

[15:46] You see, Job was a good man. And I'll give you, so this is a brief summary. The best of men, in fact, so good that God even boasted about him in heaven. And yet God allowed him to suffer unspeakable pain and loss.

And when Job dared to ask God why, God answered him with a battery of questions of his own. Questions that reveal the difference between God and humanity, between who is answerable to who. And so these two verses kind of almost reflect that interplay, putting us in our place and

demonstrating how far greater God is.

In verse 34. For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counsellor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?

Do you think you know something? We all do this. We think we, in our arrogance, we think we know something that we could actually improve on God.

[16:51] Do we think we know what God knows? Do we think we have a perspective that could improve his approach to life? I think this sentiment comes out in a number of ways.

Let me try and open them up. For example, our perception of God's character. I look at God and I think about him like I do about everyone else I know. I think, well, I like this, this and this about this person.

Then there's his other stuff that's kind of irritating, annoying or embarrassing. In fact, in relation to God, he would really be helpful toward my evangelistic efforts and my willingness to own my relationship with him in discussions that kind of get prickly in the workplace if he just kind of downplayed some of this stuff.

You know, let's just kind of, why does anger have to appear so much in the Bible? Why does judgment have to be there all the time? Play those things down and just leave us with the lovey bits. Give us a little less of the sin and judgment. Give us a little more of the love and grace, we think. God, be a little less picky and you won't even get so angry.

[18:06] So we have this perception of God's character where we're always subconsciously wanting to correct it. And then we have our perception of God's ways. Why does he have to discipline me?

Why did he decide what possessed him to think that hardship would be a good teaching tool? So often in my life, all that loss, all that ridicule, pain and loneliness that I experienced, surely there's a better way of teaching me.

God, why did you deny me what would make me truly happy? Why do you give me what's so obviously making me miserable? Your way really isn't working out too well for me.

Well, let me tell you what God's way is. And this is what Paul has just laid out in Romans. God's way is to know us and to love us since before we were even created.

Remember that kid's song? That was taken from the Bible. His way is the only way we can be saved from ourselves. And it's at his own expense.

[19:21] How can we improve on that? Where else would you experience love like this or such unwavering devotion? Who else is speaking such truth into your lives as this?

Well, we think we know something.

We think we know something better than God at times. And we try and correct God in our minds at least. And our frustrations with him that well up. They're sourced in that kind of thinking. But there's another area too that surfaces in these verses.

Who has given to the Lord? And he might repay him. You may feel you know something about God. The perfect God that you can improve on him.

Quite often, we feel that we are owed something from God because of the devotion we've shown toward him in the past. When we're not trying to improve God's way, we're trying to relate to God our way.

[20:23] We do reciprocal relationship. God does self-giving. And this mutual self-giving way of relating scares us more than I think we even realize.

To think that God is self-sufficient. That he's complete without me. That he doesn't need anything that I have to offer. What's to hold him to me?

What leverage do I have? Now, theoretically, I'll tell you that I like to relate to my family and friends by self-giving.

But I expect to receive. Joe and I have been married for 24 years. Going on 25 next year. Just so you know. Because that's the silver one.

So I want everyone to know that one. Yeah. And I know that in my relationship, I count. And in such petty ways. They have to be petty. Because Joe is so much better at self-giving than I am.

[21:22] But I can tell you one thing. And I'll show you how petty these things are. I know what kind of cup of... I know how to make a cup of tea for Joe the way she likes it. She knows how to make a cup of tea for me the way she likes it.

And every time, it rattles me. Why does it rattle me so much? I notice when Joe actually makes a cup of tea for herself and doesn't offer me one.

And I really try hard, just so I have one up, at least in one area of our lives, to make sure that I offer her a cup of tea when I'm making one.

I missed it yesterday. Joe saw me making a cup of tea for myself and said, Oh, could I have one too? And I went, Oh, no. Oh, I missed a chance to just get that one up on her. That's the stupid little areas.

And you can just imagine, if that's the small areas that I'm counting, there are much bigger and much more significant areas that I'm counting. And I can tell you that you guys are doing it too. Theoretically, we relate to each other.

[ 22 : 27 ] At least what we say is that we relate to each other by mutual self-giving. But we expect to receive. And we know that because we feel it when people let us down.

When I give and they don't, I can swallow it for a while. I can persevere for a while. But then I start to think of boundaries. Limits that preserve my ability to continue to give.

And I'm not talking about the real limits on our finite existence, like time and energy and balancing multiple demands in our lives. I'm talking about the attitude of heart that dries up and I don't get back what I give.

The attitude of heart that doesn't even count what I get. God has the attitude of heart that gives without counting.

There is nothing we can give a God like this, a God who is complete in himself. But to know that this God gives everything of himself to us without any signs of exhaustion or giving up, oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of that God.

[ 23 : 42 ] This is a worthy God. God worthy of our worship. If you haven't picked up what Paul's doing yet, then this last verse nails it.

You see, Paul is introducing you to the center of the universe and it's not you. He says in verse 36, For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be glory forever. Amen. God is active in our universe. Everything came from him. But he didn't just create the universe and wind it up and set it going in that kind of deist mindset.

He sustains the universe in an ongoing way, you can see here. Everything still owes its existence back to him. It's all because of him. I think this has two main practical implications for us.

And the first is that God is knowable on his terms. Now we've spent a bit of time talking about how unsearchable and inscrutable God is.

[ 24 : 50 ] But that's not the same as saying that God is unknowable. I need to say at this point that God is knowable. There is so much that's mysterious about him, so much depth to him that we'll never be able to plumb.

And yet God is knowable because he has made himself known. We can know him to a limited extent through the universe that he's made. We can know him to a limited extent through the fact that we're made in his image.

But ultimately, if we want to get to know who God is, we have to look at him and how he has chosen to reveal himself throughout history. And the ultimate experience, ultimate revelation of himself is actually in the culmination of God's gospel plan to rescue us.

The plan that we read about in his word. But I won't go any further on that because that's something that I don't want to steal David's thunder for next week when he speaks about scripture. It's only by looking at God and who he's revealed himself to be throughout history and what he's doing throughout history that we can begin to understand anything about God.

This is where Paul's coming from in his passage. He's not just had a transcendental moment, you know, sitting on a mountaintop and starving himself for 40 days or whatever and suddenly hallucinating.

[ 26 : 08 ] He's looking at the concrete ways that God has revealed himself to the world. He's studied what God has been doing throughout history. He's seeing its fulfillment in the gospel and he's in awe of this God.

So if we want to encounter God, we actually need to come to him on his terms, through his inspired work. And as I said, more on that next week.

His inspired word, did I say? Word. Yep. Okay. So that's the first one, that God is noble on his terms. And the second thing is that worship is his due. God is worthy. So worship is his due.

Paul makes his statement, from him and through him and to him are all things. And Paul points out the obvious here.

If everything is from and through and to him, then he is owed everything. I and you owe him everything. In Paul's words, to him be the glory forever.

[ 27 : 14 ] Amen. I think Paul takes it in a difficult direction here by using these absolutes. I think it's logical, isn't it? If everything is from him, then it belongs to him.

It's owed back to him. It's logical, but I think it's really hard to go there. Because it actually demands something of me personally. It demands a response.

This truth, and not just a response, this truth demands everything of me. Everything of me channeled in God's direction. The world turns because of God.

And now Paul is saying it revolves around him too. Now we have that saying, don't we? You think the world revolves around you? Well, you've met someone who it does.

That's true of. Someone I know once said that God is the ultimate egotist. And when I heard it, I can remember I cringed. God is the ultimate egotist? I don't like people who are full of themselves.

[ 28 : 18 ] Mainly because basically their self-importance generally robs me of my own, you know, of areas of my own self-importance. It impinges on my life and encroaches on my areas of self-importance.

Or their sense of self-importance imposes on me in a way that kind of is unpleasant. Like it can be, you know, turns us into bullies toward each other, doesn't it?

Insensitive. Uncaring. I don't like people who are full of themselves. My response is, who do you think you are?

Try saying that to God. Because he has an answer for you. God is the ultimate egotist. The sun doesn't shine out of him. It shines because of him.

The world doesn't revolve around him. The whole universe exists because of him. Because of an effortless exercise of his will. And the amazing thing is that God's expression of his ego in this way doesn't rob me of a thing.

[ 29 : 28 ] As he expresses himself in all his fullness, he fills the universe. And he fills me.

The gospel is the expression of God's ego. I'm not the source. I'm not searching inside myself anymore for this sense of significance.

God is pouring it into me. Because that's what his glory does. God is infinite and complex and powerful. He's unsearchable.

And yet he's knowable. Because he's revealed himself to us throughout history. As is recorded in the Bible. And God's greatest revelation of himself is found in the gospel.

And as we contemplate it, we too should respond in the way that Paul has done here. Wow. Wow. Well, maybe wow in a little bit more sense of eloquence than that.

[ 30 : 36 ] Wow in the sense of, oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are his judgments. And how inscrutable his ways.

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? For from him and through him and to him are all things.

To him be the glory forever. Amen.