

Wealth and Wisdom of God

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[0 : 00] Let's pray.

Father, we come now to your word, and that is when we specifically ask that by your spirit you would move in our hearts and minds to change us as we better understand who you are and better understand who we are.

So I ask that your spirit would dwell with us here now in these next few moments as we look at your word. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. Let me begin with just a simple personal note so it's not in focus later on when it shouldn't be.

Though Jim's already said that this is the last time that I'll be preaching here at St. John's. I would just like to say that though I haven't been here in the evening service as often as I've been in the morning services, that when I have been here it has been a special privilege to serve as one of your priests here at St.

John's. And in particular to serve from the pulpit in that way. And I think you know already how greatly blessed you are to have week in and week out the opportunity to hear from preachers who work to speak the truth of God's word to you and to all of us.

[1 : 34] And I've been greatly blessed to be among them and it's been a blessing for me to be with you every time that I have been. And Emily and I will miss St. John's, all of you very much.

He blessed us in many ways in the five years since we first walked into this building and we are very grateful. Dan, can you turn me down just a hair please?

I feel like it's a little too loud because I am not talking loud yet. Okay. Now our text this evening as we hear from the living God in his word is Romans in the 11th chapter and verses 33 through 36. And we've come now to this final great turning point in the book of Romans. There are five chapters left, it's true. But this is the last major turn.

And it is as though for 11 chapters now we've been driving up and up and up a long road that has climbed to the top of a mountain and now just before we are about to go over the crest and to continue on the road ahead, we pull off to the side in our car for a second here just for one final scenic overview.

[3 : 06] And just as in a real scenic overview, if you're driving up a long trek on a majestic mountain when you pause to survey the landscape behind you, the reaction that you ought to have is one of stunned awe, isn't it?

That's Paul's reaction in these verses. We've seen already the terribly sinful condition of our hearts. The hearts of all of humanity. Romans 1 through chapter 3 verse 19. Then from Romans 3 verse 20 to chapter 5 we've seen the great work of Christ's sacrifice to provide a way for us to be righteous, to be justified by faith in God's sight.

We've seen the mighty sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit to conquer sin in our lives, to make us secure in the love of Christ in Romans 6 through 8.

And we've just now come through Paul's great defense of God's sovereign grace and his promise-keeping faithfulness in Romans 9 to 11. And it's with those stunning words of Romans 11 verse 32 still ringing in our ears from last week that God has consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all.

[4 : 33] It's with those words that Paul now in response to the ways and the judgments of God breaks into an outburst of wonder and of praise. His reaction is right.

It is one of stunned awe at God. It's only four verses. That's not very long given recent passages in Romans.

And it's about as good as it gets. Because I'm just basically going to stand here and just point. And just say, look.

Just look at God. Just look at how great God is. That's what this is all about. So I think you should just relax.

There's no hidden theological landmines like election or the future of Israel waiting to blow up on us as we go here.

[5 : 37] Just relax. I have never before this morning told a congregation to relax while I'm preaching. But I want you to do that. Because I want you to soak it up.

I want every word of this text. I want you to enjoy it. I want you to delight in it. I want you to delight in God. I want you to let your heart soar.

I want you to let these truths come into your mind. And to let them shine into whatever's in your mind. And into whatever's in your heart this evening. And to sit and to listen.

And to just say, yes. Yes. This is what I'm living for. This is what I'm longing for. This is my God. And I love hearing about Him.

And He's everything to me. And I just want you to let your heart do that this evening. Because that's exactly what Paul does. And that's exactly what Paul would want us to do.

[6 : 35] And that's exactly what we should do. If we've really heard Romans 1 to 11. And if you're here this evening and you don't know this God.

Then listen and learn about Him. And consider your life in light of how great He is. And maybe say in your heart. Yes. I want to know this God.

In the way Paul seems to. In a way that's real. And will change my life. And so if your heart does say that this evening.

Then talk to someone you know here. Or to me. Or to Jim. Or to Aaron. Or to any other minister in the church. Or to those who will be praying at the end of the service. But talk to someone. If your heart is moved.

In love for the God. That we're about to talk about. It is a short text. But there's still an argument here. Paul has an argument.

[7 : 37] In just about everything he says. And I want to trace that argument with you. It won't take long to trace it. And then after we've traced it. I'll go back. And we'll take it step by step. And for the overview.

If you have the scriptures open in front of you. I hope you will do that. If you have the word. We could start at the end. And work our way back to the front. We'll start at the end in verse 36. If you're looking at verse 36.

Think of verse 36. As being in two halves. There's two sentences there. Right? For from him and through him and to him are all things. That's 36a. And then to him be glory forever.

That's 36b. Just take 36a for now. And let's work backwards. We can tell from the word for there. At the start of that verse. That verse 36a.

Is the reason. It's the reason why. Verses 34 and 35 are true. Verse 34. For who has known the mind of the Lord. Or who has been his counselor.

[8 : 41] Or who has given a gift to him. That he might be repaid. Now those are rhetorical questions. They're taken from Isaiah.

And from Job respectively. And Paul employs them here for his argument. And the answer to both questions of course is. No one. No one's God's counselor.

And no one gives God something. So that he has to repay them. But why? Why not? Because verse 36a. Everything. All things. Are from him. And through him.

And to him. And that's why. But then do you see that the four. Is also at the beginning of verse 34. You see it there. And that's there because.

Verses 34 and 35. Are the reason why verse 33 is true. You see. So there's three steps here. Verse 33 is the statement. That God's wisdom and knowledge. Are so deep.

[9 : 37] And so great. That his judgments are unsearchable. His ways are inscrutable. And that's true for the simple. Just almost observational reason.

It's almost like Paul's saying the same thing again actually. For the simple reason that no human being knows the mind of the Lord. Or makes God a debtor. Verses 34 and 35.

And then that's true. Because God's the source. And the means. And the goal. Of absolutely everything. Verse 36a. And then the whole thing. Leads Paul to verse 36b.

To him be glory forever. Amen. So that's our outline. Three steps and a conclusion. It's nice. Paul writes in this.

Three steps and a conclusion way. For us preachers to use. So come along and open your hearts. And open your minds. And let's follow what Paul says. Verse 33.

[10:35] Verse 33. Oh the depth. Oh. The depth.

This is expressive language the apostle uses. You see that little word oh. You know what that little word says. It says.

The depth is very deep. It's so deep. That the apostle peers into this depth. And out of his mouth comes just that undefined.

Oh. Oh the depth. And that little word says a whole lot more. Than any sentence or paragraph could say.

Doesn't it? This is very very deep. To say that God's knowledge and wisdom are so deep as this. Suggests a couple of things I think. I think it suggests.

[11:35] First of all that we can't see them. That they're deep and they're hidden. Because they're deep. They're out of sight. They're unreachable.

We can't go down there. That there will always be depths of God. That we do not know. That God is infinite.

That we are finite. That there is always going to be more to God. Than we will know. I think there's another aspect. Suggested by this depth idea.

I think it's the concept of God's wisdom and knowledge. As being foundational. Foundational. The foundations of things are down. The roots of things are down.

The bedrock is down. The causes. The beginnings of things are down. Deep. And at the foundation here. Are the deep things of God. So I think Paul is saying.

[12:32] God is at the bottom of things. He'll get there explicitly right. In verse 36. All things are from God. Rooted in God. And all things are moving toward God.

God too. But here the point. Is that God. Is the final explanation. That no matter how deep you go. And no matter what questions.

You're asking this evening. God is deeper. Than your questions. There is no explanation. Beneath this. Oh the depth.

And just what's down there. In that depth. I'll focus in on the wisdom. And knowledge of God. God. It's debated. It doesn't quite fit. With the way the ESV. Has translated it. To suggest this.

But I think that the riches here. Belongs together with depth. Sort of as a way. Of describing the wisdom. And the knowledge. That God's wisdom. And knowledge. Are deep.

[13:28] And rich. But even if that's not quite right. And it's debated. Whether it is. Or not. I think it's the wisdom. And the knowledge. That Paul seems to highlight. In these verses.

So we'll look to these. I think those two terms. Work together. I don't think. That Paul's trying to make. Some huge distinction here. Maybe. He's highlighting.

God's awareness. Of all things. All facts. As his knowledge. And then. How God will use. All of these. Things that he knows. For his good purposes.

That would be his wisdom. That may be. But they're working together. Obviously. And they are both. Unfathomably deep. Let's think about them.

God knows. Everything. He knows. Not just all the recorded facts. That you'd find.

[14:25] On every computer. And in every. Book. In every. Library. And anything else. In the world. That's recorded somewhere. He knows all that. But he knows. More than that. He knows.

All events. He knows. Everything that happens. Everything that happens. At the. Macro level. Of planets. And the universe.

Itself. And at the micro level. Of the sub. Atomic. Particles. Of whatever kind. They're talking about. Now as small. As they can. Figure out.

He knows. He knows. All their movements. He knows. Every location. And every condition. Of all of them. In the universe. At every moment of time. And he knows. More than that. Because God knows.

All the things. That happen. In our minds. And in our wills. As well. That he knows. All. Volitional. And emotional. And spiritual. Events. He knows. All of your thoughts.

[15:21] He knows. All of your choices. He knows. All of your feelings. He knows. All of that. And he knows. More. Than that. Because I think. Scripture teaches. That God knows.

All of these things. For all times. Past. And present. And future. And he knows. Every event. That has ever happened. And every event. That ever will happen. At every level.

Of existence. And he knows. How they all relate. To each other. And how they affect each other. And he knows. The eternal chain. Of events. That follow. From every single one of them. And God does not. Have to strive.

For that knowledge. It does not. Hurt God. Or tax him. Somehow. To know this. It's just who God is. He's also infinitely wise.

And this wisdom. That God has. Is expressed. Then. As he super intends. The history of the world. That in his wisdom.

[16:23] God has planned. All of history. Such that his judgments. And his ways. Will be carried out. And executed. I'm not pulling this out. Of thin air. In the tradition. Of the Jewish wisdom.

Literature. Which Paul is here. Showing his awareness of. God's wisdom. Includes his power. At creation. To make. And to shape. All things. As well as his wisdom.

In the revelation. Of himself. And his wisdom. In his redemptive activity. God knows. How to use. All the facts. Of the universe. And to guide. All the events. Of the universe.

To achieve. The end. For which he made. All things. We'll come to that. Paul says. In Ephesians 1. Verse 11. God. Works all things.

According to the counsel. Of his will. And that leads us on here. Because when you see. The rest of verse 33. You see that the wisdom. And the knowledge of God.

[17:18] Are not static. God doesn't just sit back. And know stuff. To talk about God's wisdom.

Especially. Is to move toward God's activity. The knowledge and the wisdom. Are deep. Oh the depths of the wisdom. And the knowledge of God. And that means then. That the judgments. And the ways of God. That draw upon that wisdom. And that knowledge. Are unsearchable. And inscrutable. Paul says. His judgments.

Those are his decisions. The decisions. That God makes. About the world. The decisions. That God makes. About human beings. His judgments.

And the ways of God. Referring simply. To his actions. To his conduct. These are the actions. And the decisions. That God. Makes in history.

[18:15] And they're based. On his deep knowledge. And wisdom. And they cannot be searched out. Paul says. They are inscrutable. Now Paul does not mean.

That God is completely. And totally. Unintelligible. Let's not say more. Than we ought to. The mysteries of God. Are being revealed. In the scriptures. You know that.

The spirit of God. Is given to illuminate. Our understanding. In fact. We do know. Things about God. We do know. Some things. About God's activities. But Paul here. Is looking at the full scope.

Of all the course. Of history. He's just been through. The path. Of redemptive history. In the last three chapters. And he's thinking. About now. History. I think at every level. And I think. Paul just recognizes.

What we would all affirm. If we're honest. Because even while. We know something. About God's overarching will. And his plan. All we can really do.

[19:12] Isn't this true. All we can really do. Is perceive. The course of history. As the events. Occur. Around us. And I'm sure you agree.

That there's lots of things. That don't. Really make. Much sense to us. And that's because. For us to perceive. The events.

Even if we think. We're perceiving them. In great detail. Is not the same thing. As to understand. What God is doing. In and through. All of them. We simply can't know that.

Maybe we catch a glimpse. Of it from time to time. Maybe God. Let's us in a little bit. On what he's up to. In certain circumstances. In our lives.

Or in our world. Or in history. Around us. But Paul here. Is talking about. The immensity. Of the judgments. And the ways of God. And for the most part. Those are far. Out of reach.

[20:14] Which is exactly. Where they belong. Now then. Verses 34 and 35. For who has known. The mind of the Lord. Or who has been.

His counselor. The answer is. No one. Or who has given. A gift to him. That he might. Be repaid. The answer is.

No one. Paul's drawing here. As I said earlier. From Isaiah. And from Job. Fascinating context. From which to pull these quotes. The contexts are helpful.

But the point. That Paul's making. Isn't complicated. We could just rephrase. Those rhetorical questions. And you've got it. First. Verse 34. Let me restate it. God doesn't take advice.

God does not take advice. From anyone. Regarding his running.

[21 : 13] Of the universe. And history. As it plays out. To the end. That he's intended for it. God is the one. Who has the deep knowledge. And the wisdom. Not us.

We know something. Of his mind. Because of revelation. But we don't know. What God knows. We don't dare advise God. As if God needed us. To do that. But of course.

Advice is just. What a great many people. And probably. Some of us. From time to time. Do. Try to give God. Either we do it outright.

Or we do it by implication. In how we live. As if. We're the ones. With all the knowledge. And the wisdom. And God. Ought to kind of catch up. With the way. Things should be.

And there's scores of people. Who've basically. Concluded. That if God. Doesn't run things. The way that makes sense. To them. Then they'll just. Not believe in God. And I know people.

[22 : 13] I love people. Who say that. If. Say that. As if their unbelief. Is somehow. A threat to God. I like what one.

Commentator says here. That human arrogance. Seizes upon this. Inscrutibility. As a reason. To doubt.

To mock. Or to question. God's wisdom. Or goodness. The humility. Proper to faith. Stands. In awe. That the God. Of all creation. Is the God. Of the gospel. Of Jesus. Whose utter. Trustworthiness. Was demonstrated. Once for all. In Jesus's resurrection.

You sort of need. All of Romans 1 to 11. To really resonate. With what Paul's doing here. Because the point. Is that you don't. Have to understand. Everything. Or have a reason.

[23 : 11] For it. What you have to do. Is trust the God. Who has already shown you. His trustworthiness.

To carry out. His purposes. In the world. So don't advise. God. Paul says. Trust him. We have to be okay.

Brothers and sisters. With not understanding. Things. And not having an answer. For all that happens. To us. Or all that happens. In our world. Right?

I'm not saying. That it's. Ever. And always wrong. To ask God. Why? To cry out to God. But there's a.

There's a point here. There's a point. At which our crying out. Turns into. Advice. And us. Almost.

[24 : 06] Accusing God. Of. Doing things wrongly. That's the point. We dare not cross. We won't see the reasons. For it all.

People. But what we have to do. Whether we see any reasons. For it or not. Is trust God in it. That's what we have to do. And then the second point.

In verse 35. Restate the rhetorical question. Don't try to put God. In your debt. So that you think. God owes you one. God.

Never owes us one. There are no favors. To be bought. God is not impressed. With us. As though something we've done.

Has wowed him so much. That he's going to make sure. We get a special favor. In the end. You've got it coming for you. No. There's no negotiating. With God. We have no bargaining.

[25 : 03] Position. Before God. Acts 17. 5. God is not served. By human hands. As though he needed anything. For he himself. Gives to all. Life. And breath.

And everything. Everything. So don't offer God advice. Paul would say to us. As if. We know better than God does.

What ought to be. And don't try to put God. In your debt. Or to impress him somehow. He won't ever owe you one.

And so then. Verse 36a. Here's why we. Don't counsel God. And why we. Don't put God in our debt. Because it's from him.

And not us. And through him. And not us. And to him. And not us. Are all things. That all things.

[26 : 02] Are from him. That in some way. God is the source. Of all things. That all things. Are through him. That in some way. God is the means. By which all things. Are accomplished. And that all things.

Are to him. That in some way. God is the goal. Of all things. That God himself. Is the purpose. For which the world. Was created.

And for which you and I. Were created. And so I see Paul here. To be teaching. That the ultimate origin. The ultimate cause.

The ultimate decisive reason. For everything. Is God. That there's no explanation. For anything. That is. Or anything. That happens.
That is deeper. Or more decisive. In the end. Than God. That things. Don't. Just. Happen.
[26 : 58] That if Paul. Is to be. Believed here. And there are other texts. That speak to this truth. But here as well.

If Paul is to be. Believed. Then there is always. A purpose. For what God. Causes. To happen directly. And what God.
Permits. To happen. Indirectly. And that's very carefully. Phrased. The way I just said that. That. But in either case. Whether God. Causes things.
To happen directly. Or God. Permits. Things. To happen. Indirectly. The buck. Stops. With God. Always. That nothing.
Falls. Outside. Of the counsel. Of the will of God. So let's not. Spend our time. Trying to get God. Off the hook. He doesn't need our help. To do that. We don't have to excuse God.
[27 : 52] From the hard stuff of life. We have to trust him. We have to trust that he is in fact. Accomplishing his purposes. As unsearchable. And inscrutable.

As that will be at times. We have to trust. That his purposes are coming about. And they are right. And they are just. And they are ultimately good. That is not easy.
I am not trying to paint that. As something that is easy to do. But somehow. By God's grace. And work. Deep in the heart. Of where we think. And feel. And live.
We have to trust that. You have to trust that. And it takes us then.
Right into Paul's conclusion. In verse 36b. That after all of that. There is this final thought. From the apostle. To him.
[28 : 51] Paul concludes. Be glory forever. Amen. What is it that Paul wants. More than anything. Because he does want it.

Right. That is the reason why. He puts an amen. At the end. Of this verse. May it be so. He wants something. He wants this. What does he want?
He wants God. To be glorified forever. To him be glory forever. What does that mean? It means that Paul wants. For all of history.
That Paul wants. For all of creation. To reach its goal. To come to the time. When all things. And all people. Demonstrate. And speak the truth.
About who God is. Isn't that what it means. To glorify God. You glorify God. When you say. True things. About him. Paul longs.
[29 : 47] For everything. For everything. To reach the point. When God. Will be clearly. Seen to be. The all knowledgeable. The all wise God. Who has acted. Perfectly.

In all matters. To bring about. All of history. In just the way. He intended it. Because all things. All of creation. Exists. To show off.
God. To make it clear. That all things. Are from God. And through God. And to God. Not to the negation.
Of who you are. Or the things. That are in the world. That is. Why the things. Are in the world. That is why. We're human beings. To display.
The glory of God. Not asking you. To get rid of yourself. Or deny yourself. I'm asking you. To find out. Who you're meant to be. That all of history.
[30 : 45] Is designed by God. To one day. Be a completed story. That displays. His greatness. And his beauty. And his wisdom. And that within that history. You. Personally. Exist.

To make God. Look like. What he really is. Glorious. To him. Be glory forever. Amen.
So let me leave you here. At the end of this sermon now. And the end of my time. At St. John's. With a question. That is a question. For your hearts. And the question is.
Are you. Glad. About this. Will you think about that. For a second. Are you.
Glad. About this. I. Does this make you. Happy. Or not. Does it make you. Happy.
[31 : 45] That God. Is the end. Goal. Of all things. That his glory. Is the purpose. Of your. Life. And your. Existence.

I mean. Does that. Let's check our hearts. Brothers and sisters. Just check your hearts.
Because here we are. At the final turn. In Romans. And we're about. To be launched. Into chapter 12. With all the. Practical demands. That flow. From. All that God. Has done for us.

In Christ. And the bridge. That's here. Between the intense. Theology. Of Romans 1 to 11. And the practical. Expression. Of Romans 12 to 15. Is worship. It's doxology.

This is the longest. Doxology. In all of Paul's letters. Worship. Is the concluding. Word of the universe. And Paul's. Heart. Is soaring. Oh. The depths.

[32 : 40] Of the riches. And the wisdom. And the knowledge. Of God. To God. Be glory. Forever. Forever. I hope. Your heart. Soars. With Paul's heart. Or at least.

That if it's not. Soaring. At this moment. You want it to. And all my. You will pray.

And live. And work. To the end. That your heart. Would rejoice. In the glory. Of God. Rejoicing.

In the wisdom. And the knowledge. Of God. Yes. That's brought about. Our salvation. Because of his great love. For us in Christ. We praise him. For that. For our salvation. But.

We do so. Remembering. That our salvation. In itself. Is the penultimate. It's not the ultimate. That the ultimate. Thing.

[33 : 40] In all of our lives. And the ultimate thing. In all of the universe. Is the glory. Of God. In the name.

Of the Father. And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. Amen.