

“Glory to God Alone”

Romans 11:33-36

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for

Northwest Hills Community Church

on the occasion of her 1-year anniversary

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Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come. x10. Are you sick of hearing that yet? God isn't. Imagine yourself there, in the vicinity of God's great throne. The Apostle John tells us in the book of Revelation that there are four living creatures, covered with eyes in front and in back...one like a lion, the second like an ox, the third with the face of a man, and the fourth like a flying eagle...each with six wings...and day and night they never stop saying, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*" These creatures were created to do just that...to sing the praises of Almighty God for eternity; to give glory to God Most High day and night without ceasing. And the text goes on to say that whenever these creatures give glory, honor, and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before his throne and say, "*You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created, and have their being.*" These four odd creatures with eyes and wings, day and night they worship God and proclaim his holiness, and whenever they do it –which is always – the twenty-four elders proclaim God's worthiness –his singular worthiness- to receive glory and honor and power because by his will all things have been created, and by his will they are sustained, and have their being. According to the Apostle John in the book of Revelation, that's what these creatures were created for.

But I want you to know today that you were created for nothing less. You were created for nothing less – you are given air to breath, food to sustain you, sunshine to light your way, fellowship with friends and family – not for your comfort and survival, but to proclaim God's glory and honor and power with all that you are.

God does not seek your perfection, but he calls for your faithfulness...to be faithful in proclaiming his glory and honor and power in your thoughts and actions and prayers and giving, through your love and your work and your time, and by every means available to you. If this is what we've been created for – to bring glory to God – then we've got some work to do, don't we?

This morning we celebrate the glory of God alone! This morning we recognize we are here because of God's goodness and for His glory. This morning we celebrate a year of growth as Northwest Hills Community Church, but we also celebrate the One who has set us on this course. We join with the great reformers in saying, Soli Deo Gloria...glory to God alone!

Our anniversary text comes from Romans chapter 11. This is the hinge within Paul's great theological treatise. In a nutshell, Paul spends the first 11 chapters showing us the utterly sinful condition of our hearts, he paints a beautiful picture of the great work of Jesus on the cross which allows us to be justified by faith alone, apart from our own works. And he shows us the mighty work of the Holy Spirit who sets us apart to be holy and makes us secure in the Lord. And then in the chapters leading up to our text today, Paul defends God's sovereign grace and his incredible faithfulness and then he makes a stunning conclusion in verse 32 that God has delivered us all to disobedience that he might have mercy on us all. That's the first part of Paul's greatest work in 3 sentences, but those truths are demand a response.

In our text this morning, Paul responds to this comprehensive revelation of the ways and judgments of God and he breaks into explicit wonder and praise. It is that wonder and praise, found in verses 33 to 36, that constitutes our text this morning. If you haven't already turned to Romans chapter 11, please do so now. In verses 33 to 36, the Apostle Paul writes this: *"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing*

out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

This is where God wants you to be. When you've discovered your utter depravity, when you've come to the end of yourself and recognize that nothing you can do can earn your way into God's presence, when you've acknowledged that it is by Christ's work alone that you can be redeemed, and when you realize it is all because of God's grace and for his glory, God wants you to be amazed at his mercy and he wants you to worship Him through Jesus Christ. It is then and only then that you are able to live out the practical, moral demands that Paul declares throughout the rest of the book of Romans. Are you there yet? Are you able, yet, to give God the glory and honor and power that are due him?

Today we not only celebrate this past year of God's goodness to us, but this entire month we are making our way to Reformation Day on October 31. So many of us search and search for alternatives to Halloween, and few of us know what God did through a German monk on that day in the year 1517. So today and this month, we not only celebrating God's goodness to us, but we are celebrating the rich legacy we've inherited these past 491 years and seek to pass it on by being faithful to those foundational and Biblical principles of the Protestant Reformation.

In my estimation, there is no better place to start than with the overarching principle of God's sovereignty and God's glory in our life and salvation, especially as we celebrate our 1st year. Today we are going to look at God's worthiness to be honored and glorified, and we are going to honor and glorify him by proclaiming this year at NHCC to be to the glory of God alone! Are you with me?

Let's read our text again. *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

This is what scholars call the doxology. Some churches even sing this doxology in their worship gatherings. The Greek word *doxa* picked up a new meaning between the 3rd and 1st centuries before Christ when Hebrew scholars in the Egyptian province of Alexandria translated the Hebrew Scriptures (our Old Testament) into Greek, the common language of the day. In this translation of the Scriptures, called the Septuagint, these scholars rendered the Hebrew word for *glory* (Kabowd) as *doxa*. And so this translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was used by the early church and is often quoted by New Testament authors like the Apostle Paul.

The Old Testament *kabowd* derives from a word meaning, "to be heavy," and it gives a sense that the one possessing glory is laden with riches and power and position. We even use heaviness in a similar way when we say, "He really throws his weight around."

When the Hebrew scholars translated the Old Testament for the Septuagint, it seemed appropriate for them that the Greek word *doxa* was the most suitable word for rendering the Hebrew word *kabowd*, since it carried the notion of reputation or honor, which was also the case for the word *kabowd*. The very term doxology comes from the Greek word, *doxa*, from which we get the word *glory*.

The primary idea is the uniqueness of God; the idea that God alone is worthy to "throw his weight around." He alone is rich enough and powerful enough, in a class all his own. That is what true worship is...to be filled with awe of God's power and purpose and plans.

See Paul has been focusing on God's redemptive plan throughout chapters 9, 10, & 11. And as Paul meditates on it, he comes to a point of awe at the mystery and majesty of God's plan.

In these chapters Paul has shown that God is faithful to His Word and that He has a saving purpose that will not fail! If you don't believe me, go home and read the book of Romans. I dare you! Martin Luther, the great reformer, of whom you will hear more about later this month, read the book of Romans and it set his life on an entirely different course and by his actions the church was set on a different course and this world was turned upside down. God's Word has a way of doing that!

What Paul proclaims is that God has a gracious purpose in election, choosing a remnant of Jews in that age, while blinding the majority. He has a sovereign plan for the inclusion of Gentiles in His saving purposes! Yet, those who reject Christ remain responsible for their unbelief. The gospel is freely offered to all who will "*call upon the name of the Lord.*" Both Jews and Gentiles are invited to come and all may be saved. There is coming a day when the blindness from Israel's hearts will be removed and they will embrace their Messiah with faith and so, as the Scripture says, "*all Israel will be saved.*" Remember, this does not mean all of those who *believe* they are Israel; rather, these are those who have the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Paul is so struck with awe having communicated such awesome truth; his response is nothing less than, "O!" That might be easy for us to pass over but it is a term used in the Greek to express very strong emotions. You get the sense that Paul has become overcome with emotion as he meditates on the greatness of God and His plan. But he doesn't stop there . . . "*O the depth of the riches . . .*" Paul is exhausting human language to express the greatness of God. "*Both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.*" God's knowledge is His active involvement in the affairs of men. Not merely

knowledge about, but actually causing those things to happen. And God's wisdom is the execution of that knowledge in the world.

God's judgments are unsearchable and His ways are incomprehensible! Here Paul gives praise to God, not just for what he knows but also because of what he doesn't know! For the apostle Paul, not being able to understand what God is doing was not a reason to abandon the faith. Instead it was a reason for praise. A "god" that we can fully comprehend would not be much of a "god", right? God himself declares in *Isaiah 55:8-9*, *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. (9) For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*

Not only was Paul filled with awe at the greatness of God's plan, he was also speechless at God's greatness! In verses 34-35, Paul asks three rhetorical questions in a row. All three have the same assumed answer. See if you know what the answer is.

- Who has known the mind of the Lord?
- Who has been God's counselor?
- Who has first given to God?

The answer: NO ONE. In other words, if you think you know the mind of God. If you think you've counseled God – and many of us seek to do just that with our advise-laden prayers. And if you think you have given anything to God that wasn't already his, then you need to be set straight. Ain't nobody in that position. These questions serve to shut our mouths in God's presence. We might be tempted to boast, but about what are we qualified to boast?

In verse 34, Paul uses the language of *Isaiah 40:13*. Isaiah wrote of the deliverance of the nation of Israel out of the hands of the Babylonians. In our text, though, Paul writes, "*Who has known the*

mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?" The implication is that no one could have foreseen God's deliverance of the nation of Israel from their Babylonian captivity. No human could have devised that plan. In a similar way, Paul uses this verse in Romans to highlight that no human could have devised the plan for God to turn again to the nation of Israel in the last days and remove their blindness that they might experience salvation, but this is exactly what God does.

In verse 35, the question is reminiscent of God's question to Job in *Job 41:11*. The question is who gave first to God, tell us and He'll pay you back! And then there is silence. God asked Job, *Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me.* Job's response, like ours, is silence.

Have you ever been silenced by the majesty of God? So many of us, great beneficiaries of the principles and practices of the Great Reformation, come into our sanctuaries boisterous and loud and we forget that we call them sanctuaries. We forget these are places set aside for the honor and worship of God. I'm certainly not saying that we should come with drawn faces and pursed lips, but when was the last time you came here – even to a school cafeteria – and were silenced by the majesty of God?

Look at the final verse, verse 36. Paul was struck by the centrality of God in all things! This is the basis of doxology, God Himself! God is shown here to be the source of all things, the means of all things, and the goal of all things!

- God is the source of all things: **James 1:17** says, *17Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.*

- God is the means of all things: **1 Chronicles 29:14** says, *14 "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.*
- God is the goal of all things: **1 Corinthians 15:24-28** says *24Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27For he "has put everything under his feet."^[a] Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.*

Do you love seeing and showing the glory of God? Abraham Kuyper has said, "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!'" That includes you.

So, what is our response? We put a hand over our mouth and bow before His majesty! And when we're finally able to speak, we speak of His greatness!

This is why God created the universe. This is why he ordained history. This is why he sent his Son. This is why you exist. Forever to see and savor and show the glory of Christ, who is your creator, your redeemer, and your soon coming King. *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come! To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Pray with me.*