

All Roads Lead Here: Doxology
By Jason Huff
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Isaiah 40:12-14; Luke 10:21; Romans 11:33-36

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Romans 11:33-36. This is the word of the Lord. “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.”

Have you ever had a moment where you just had to put everything aside and stop what you were doing? Maybe it was when you had to pull over the car because you noticed the sunrise or sunset that was just too gorgeous to pass by. Maybe it was a moment when your infant child finally fell asleep and you just look at the amazing little bundle lying before you. Maybe it was in a state park or on a mountaintop. Maybe it was after a great film or a concert or a work of art where you just had to stop for a moment to catch your breath.

When we have a moment like that, the only thing really appropriate is to praise God for His goodness. Because while every moment is an opportunity to give God glory, when God knocks our socks off, that particular moment is worthy of special consideration of the wonder of who God is.

That’s precisely what happens at the end of Romans 11. For 11 chapters, Paul has addressed the dire problem of the human condition, how sin affects all people without discrimination, and how Jesus Christ’s life, death, and resurrection offer the solution to it. Paul has walked us through the thorny thicket of God’s choices being greater than and outranking our own, and he’s shown us God’s way of remaining true to His promises to Abraham and his descendants while also bringing His people from the rest of the world into His Kingdom.

It’s an amazing study in the workings of God, as much as we can understand them. And now that we’ve reached the summit of theology, now that Paul is ready to get into the practical side of how we should act as members of God’s family in chapter 12, he stops for doxology – which simply means a song of praise.

Praise songs and hymns teach us a lot, and we’ll get something out of the theology of Paul’s statement in a minute. But the core of hymnody, the reason we sing every week here, the reason that our service is loaded with music, is the adoration of God. Think about that for a minute...the adoration of God. When did I last sit still long enough to praise God in my everyday life? We do a lot of adoration of God in church, but what about after a hard day’s work? What about after a wonderful meal and not just before in the saying of grace?

I tend to be a content kind of guy...I want to know the information. I love the Presbyterian church and Reformed theology because it’s the only Christian viewpoint I know that makes sense of all the various parts of the Bible and pieces them together properly. I want to know God. But to know God is to adore God. You can’t know Him and not worship Him.

There are many scholars out there who have studied Scripture their whole lives and yet don't have a relationship with the Almighty. The Bible is a book to be analyzed and scrutinized. But that's not the reason we have the Bible. If you've ever read the Bible on a regular basis, you start to realize it's talking about you – in a sense, it's reading you. You find yourself in its passages. You find it directly addressing your sins, your sufferings, your hopes, your fears, your lostness without God.

The Bible makes us nervous because you cannot read it for long without doing one of two things: turning it into a remote study of far-off people and places and their beliefs about a God they told stories about, or worshipping the God that reveals Himself to us through it. And so either you worship and adore and praise the God of the Bible or you disconnect from Him. If you do not take time to worship Him and make it a regular part of your life, you are disconnected from God who gives you life and strength and hope.

That doesn't mean you have to have praise music turned on in the car or singing every day. We don't know that Paul ever sung this doxology. Don't get tripped up on the idea of worship as music. Worship is adoration of God. The question I keep asking myself is, have I spent enough time today in appreciation of God? If not, it doesn't require music or solitude or a congregation or a praise team. It just takes turning to Him and saying "thank you," contemplating who He is and His works and finding awe in Him and expressing it to Him.

We want to praise God, to show awe at the wonders of Him. Paul does that through several different concepts that identify key aspects of God. And we're just going to take them one by one. Here's the first sentence: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

If you ever want to know that the Bible is not just a book of information or stories, you have situations like this, where Paul starts his doxology with "oh!" It really is "oh" in Greek too. It's an interjection. It's the same thing we do when something surprises us or delights us and we go, "Oh!" When we get Vicki's dessert after church, what do we say? "Oh!" Now I'm not putting down Vicki's wonderful treats, but when we see all God is and all He has done, that "oh" is so much deeper and more awesome than even excitement over some of the best brownies in the world.

The rest of the sentence is literally, "depths of riches and wisdom and knowledge of God." Our translation today turns riches into a modifier of wisdom and knowledge, and that could possibly be true. Yet each one by itself is true of God. God's riches are unfathomable. There is nothing He can't provide for us. In Psalm 50, God rebukes the people for giving Him offerings without actually turning their hearts to Him. And God says, "I don't need your bulls and goats; I own every animal in the forest and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains and the creatures of the field are mine. The world is mine and everything in it is too...call on me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver you."

When we ask God for help, we aren't asking for a loan from a bank without money. God has an infinite supply of what we need. God continually asks His people to call on Him for what we need. It's pride that keeps us from doing that, the idea that we can manage on our own. But we need God's provision. Everything belongs to Him. When we ask with the things of God in mind, He will deliver.

God's wisdom is beyond our depths too. What's the wisdom of the world look like these days? Everybody's in a furor over whether someone stood or knelt during the National Anthem. The press is writing eulogies for a man who made pornography mainstream, who through it ruined millions of lives and harmed true, godly feminism. Millions of US citizens in Puerto Rico are without power and clean drinking water, and we can't get folks to see past the political side they've chosen to support. That's the wisdom of the world in October 2017.

But God's wisdom stands. The Ten Commandments have been studied for 3500 years. The Jewish system of law God wrote has affected every law code in the West ever since, directly or indirectly. English playwrights and poets who believe there is no God write in a language and simile and metaphor that have been influenced by Christianity since its earliest use. God's wisdom tells us that we are dust, a passing vapor – and when you see what we talk about in the press, you see it's true. No story lasts until next week. We've almost completely forgotten about the flooding in Houston because that was so long ago, right? But God's wisdom has stood the test of time.

And God's knowledge? Greater than all our smartest minds put together. It's amazing how people have tried to say that the Bible is fanciful, that it describes kingdoms and nations and people groups that surely didn't exist at the times it says they did in the places it says. Until archeology comes along and, after much debate and frustration, says, "Oh yeah, the Bible's description had it right all along." We can put a man on the moon but we can't stop the common cold. Yet God in Jesus healed those blind since birth. He raised the dead, and He overcame death Himself. We could wrap up all our knowledge about nuclear physics and atomic structure and space-time theory and every other field the world has to offer, and it wouldn't even represent a fraction of God's knowledge about the universe He created.

Paul goes on: "How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" Isn't that true? We can't know why God does He does and why He leads us on the paths He has. We argue whether it was necessary for Jesus to die in order for the Father's anger at sin to be satisfied. We debate why Jesus made Paul a greater apostle than most of the 12 who traveled with Him constantly. Why does God do these things? We don't know.

It doesn't mean that we cannot understand God at all; He has made Himself known to us. But part of the awe we have is that God does amazing things that we cannot fathom He has put into place. How is it that God put all of us in the right place at the right time to become CrossWay? How is it that God brought Catha and I together, two Presbyterians at a Christian university that had very few Presbyterians on campus at all, and stick us right next to each other in a handbell group? How is it that Jesus' tiny band of followers who deserted Him at His death went on to found the most influential faith in the whole world? It's through God's awesome plans. We don't know how possibly He works them out. We just look at them in awe.

Next are the things that we often trip over ourselves. The first is, “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?” I have trouble with that one myself sometimes. We have a habit of telling God what He should have done and said. But God keeps His own council. He doesn’t have a need for our opinion.

A few weeks ago, I heard a preacher say that God wasn’t jealous, despite what the Ten Commandments say, that jealousy is always bad. He suggested that Moses had written it that way to try and explain God to the backward people he was leading. But the Ten Commandments are the very Word of God within the Word of God! But you don’t like something in the Bible, we often say, “Well, surely there’s some way around it.” It’s true that often times, things are taken out of context and used to try and make God look bad.

But it’s a dangerous road to go down to suggest that we know better than God. God, what were you thinking when you said you loved Jacob but you hated Esau? You love everybody, don’t you, God, because you’re supposed to be that way because I said so? Couldn’t you cut Esau a break? Why is it that you commanded the death penalty for people who committed murder, God? Wasn’t that a little harsh – I mean, aren’t two lives lost worse than just one? And God, how could you command the Israelites to take over the Promised Land and kill anybody who didn’t flee before them? God, how can you justify any sort of war?

We hear these sorts of statements all the time, sometimes from our own mouths. We might even hear, “Well, the Jesus I know loves everybody unconditionally and would never tell two people they couldn’t sleep together or tell sinners that they were destined for hell if they didn’t repent or tell someone that they had to hate their brother or sister or mother to follow Him.” Except that He did do all of those things, explicitly. We want to council God as to what we want morality to be, so that we can be in the right, so that we don’t have to feel bad about anything we do or our friends and family do.

But we don’t know the mind of the Lord. We are not His councilor. Over and over, the Bible tells us that living in obedience to God brings blessings. It doesn’t tell us why, and it only occasionally tells us what those blessings will be. (In Jesus’ case, He told us that we were blessed when we were persecuted, so we can’t get too excited!) But as Paul cries this out in praise, we remember that this is a good thing. Our ways lead to death and destruction. Our ways lead to war and ruin. God’s ways lead to eternal life.

That links to Paul’s second tripping point: “Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?” How much I’d love for God to be in my debt! How good I think it would feel to say, “Oh, no, God, you can’t do that, I did my good deeds, I paid for my crimes, I paid my taxes, now I’ve got you over a barrel.” None of this business from Isaiah 64:6, that all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags in God’s sight. No, I’d love for God to be in my debt.

But it doesn’t work that way, and hallelujah! What if we could manipulate God like a genie in a bottle – or worse, what if someone who hated us, our enemy, could do it? We’d be in trouble! God does not owe anybody anything, but that’s good. If you’ve ever seen a mob movie, you know what happens when somebody in law enforcement is on the take. It’s corruption, right? Look the other way when Johnny the Snitch gets taken out.

But God is incorruptible. We cannot pay Him anything to bring us to our side or for Him to be forced to do anyone's bidding. But that's good, too. Because when He loves us, it's not because He's forced to love us but because He wants to.

Have you ever been on either end of a forced hug or a forced kiss? It's often between the grandkids and Grandpa or Grandma. The parents say, "Go give Grandma a kiss." And the kid usually does it, but their heart isn't in it. It's coerced. A little peck and get out of here. But when that grandchild really loved Grandma or Grandpa and that huge comes out, that's so awesome because it's real. We can't put God in our debt, which means that God is never going to do anything for us begrudgingly. He does all the wonderful things He does for us out of His love for us, His overflowing mercy and grace. Thank God we can't put Him in our debt.

Here's the last part of the doxology: "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen." Here's what we ultimately have learned in all of Romans so far: God has created the universe for His good pleasure. He made us as His prize creation, and though we abandoned Him, He has put in place His rescue plan to save us. While we were in deepest darkness, His love was far too great to abandon us.

Nothing came into existence except by His word. Nothing in this world, nothing in this universe, doesn't have its basis and root in Him. When we are creative, when we write a song or a book or make a piece of art, set up a perfect picture, we are echoing the creativity of God. And all of creation is for Him. When we create something, whether it's a lasagna or a portrait, we might sell it, we might have agreed to create it as part of our work, we might give it away, but it's our creation made for the purposes we have in mind. God created the entirety of everything with the same thought. It's made to bring Him glory, for His enjoyment. And that's only right.

And what we find is that we are made for Him. As the saying goes, God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. When we live in ways that are righteous, when we follow Jesus and His paths and His ways, God's goodness shines through our lives. We weren't made for the temporary and unsatisfying pleasures the world gives. We were made for more. We were made to enjoy God's peace and presence, to reflect His glory, to find our rest in His rest. Why do we praise God? Because that's not only what God wants, it's what we were created to do. Imagine having a sports car that you never get out on the road or the perfect dessert that never gets eaten. Defeats the purpose, right? We only fulfill our purpose when we reflect God's glory, when we come into relationship with God through the sacrifice of Jesus.

The big lesson for the week is so simple that I'm just going to end us here: give God your praise. Live your life as a hymn to Him. Take time to praise Him with both your words and your actions. That's what we were made for. It may feel strange or uncomfortable at first. But the more you do it, the easier it will come. And soon, no matter what your situation is, you will find ways to praise God through it.

Will you sing your song of praise to the Lord this week?