

Paul's Doxology

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'd like us to turn back together to Romans chapter 11. Romans 11, and I want us just to look together at the very last section of the chapter from verse 33 to verse 36, where we read, 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 glory forever. Amen.

Going into a new year is often an exciting time. It's a time where we get the opportunity to refocus, to think about what we want to aim for in the year ahead. And often at the turn of a year, there's a sense of optimism and energy for the months ahead. There's always something exciting and encouraging about a new year. But I think it's the case that this year, it's definitely a bit harder to feel like that. And maybe for you, you're more nervous about this coming year than you've ever been before. And certainly, everything's really different just now.

And in that situation, instead of thinking, well, you know, I know my plans for the year ahead, I know what I want to do. Instead of that, we can find ourselves easily thinking, I'm not really sure what to do. I don't know what's best. And often in life, we can feel like that and for a variety of reasons. As individuals, maybe we feel pressure at work. Maybe we're worried about our families. Maybe we're finding school a wee bit hard. Maybe we're confused about ourselves or about our circumstances. And so as individuals, we can often find ourselves thinking, well, I don't really know what to do. And I think as a nation and as an island, the circumstances that we're in leave us feeling like that as well. And the start of 2021 has a kind of shadow of uncertainty and apprehension that's not really been like that for a long time.

And even if we think of the people who are responsible for the nation, our leaders in government, in so many ways, they've done an amazing job over these past few months in all the unprecedented circumstances they've faced. But I'm sure in the midst of all that, there's been many times when they've found themselves thinking, I don't know what to do. And in two weeks' time, there's a decision to be made about what happens with schools. I am sure that there's people in the government who are thinking, we just don't know what to do. And if they asked me what to do, I don't think I would know what to tell them. And in many ways, we're kind of facing, you know, we're facing a situation that's full of big, important decisions. It's talking about the stuff that really matters.

And yet, right in the midst of that, we're like, well, we don't really know what to do. The question I want us to ask today is when it comes to the stuff that's really important and the things that really matter, does God know what to do? And as we consider that question, I want us to look at these verses at the end of Romans 11, because I think that they give us the answer. So let's just go through these verses together. We'll start in verse 33. And if you just have a wee look at that in your Bibles in front of you or on your phones, you'll see it says there, Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways. Let's look at the first chunk of that to begin with. You'll see that there's three things that Paul is pointing us to. He talks about the depth of God's riches, the depth of God's wisdom, and the depth of God's knowledge. And it's good to just stop and think about each of these three things that we're going to be. And that word depth is a brilliant word. It's pointing us to the idea of immensity and inexhaustible abundance. You think of something that's just really, really deep.

[5 : 06] And that inexhaustible abundance is being applied by Paul to God's riches, to his wisdom, and to his knowledge. So what are God's riches? Well, as we said to the children, often when we think of riches, we can think of material wealth. But that, of course, is a very narrow view of riches.

And the film *Richie Rich* conveys that, I think, very clearly and effectively. Riches is much more than just money or possessions. It refers rather to things that are valuable.

And if you think about the stuff that you really value, I doubt very much that your bank balance is top of that list. There's other things that are much, much more important than that. The question we have to ask is, what does God value? Well, it's interesting because way back at the beginning of Romans, Paul uses the word riches in another version. In that verse, he talks about the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience. And that's reminding us that the things that God considers to be valuable are things like kindness, forbearance, patience. In other words, his grace and his love.

These are the things that, to God, are really valuable. And, of course, one of the great tragedies of humanity is that today we still constantly pour our energy into gaining riches that are actually very shallow. So the clothes we wear, the car we drive, the postcode that you have, the salary you take home, do any of these things really have any depth to them? When you lie on your bed at the very end of your life, will you think to yourself, oh, I wish I'd earned more? Or will you think to yourself, I wish I'd loved more? Very often the culture around us is pushing and chasing for shallow riches.

In the gospel, God is offering us true riches, joy, peace, hope, security, and love. And verse 33 is reminding us that in God, these riches are incredibly deep. So that means, if you ask the question, will God's patience, kindness, and love for you ever run dry? Never. Not a chance.

[7 : 56] What about the depth of God's wisdom? Often our wisdom reaches its limit, so we face situations that seem impossible to overcome. Sometimes you look at the brokenness of people's lives in our own nation, and even in our own community, and you find yourself thinking, what can we do?

And in the awful situations that life can often bring, we all desperately need wisdom, don't we? So just now, we need wisdom about the coronavirus. We need wisdom about Brexit. We need wisdom about national debt. We need wisdom about the social problems in our towns and cities and communities.

We need wisdom as to how to help a generation that's growing up amidst a lot of confusion. But very quickly, our wisdom reaches its limit. And that's why humanity has never been able to overcome the problem of humanity. And although we solve lots of problems, I think we actually, I think humanity creates more problems than it solves. In contrast to all of that, God's wisdom is deep. We find ourselves looking at specific situations and we think to ourselves, I don't know how to fix this. And so you think, well, how do we fix the breakdown of families?

How do we fix inequalities and prejudices? How do we fix corruption? Even these specifics are too hard for us to solve. God looks at the whole universe and he looks at all the wreckage that sin has caused, and he says, I'll fix it. And in his inexhaustible wisdom, he has implemented a plan of salvation whereby all the requirements of a perfect holy God and all the needs of a helpless, broken humanity are perfectly met. And it all centers on Jesus Christ. And all the great doctrines of Christianity fit together as a perfect plan of salvation, which comes from the deep wisdom of God. And that's amazing because it means that no matter how much of a mess your life is in, God will never ever say to you,

I don't know what to do. And we need to write that truth on our hearts. If your life is a mess, even if no one else knows, even if just inwardly you're in turmoil and you feel like everything's mucked up, God's wisdom is deep enough to fix you and heal you and restore you. It's a brilliant reminder that no one is ever too far gone for God. Often when our lives are in a real mess or when we're in a huge tub, whether it's ourselves or people that we love, we'll say that they're in the depths.

[11 : 11] The amazing thing about God is that no matter how far down into those depths you have slipped, God's wisdom is deep enough to reach you. Thirdly, there's the depth of God's knowledge.

So at one level, that refers to the fact that God knows everything. That's what we mean when we say that God is omniscient. He knows all things. And we sang about that in Psalm 139. There's an inexhaustible depth to God's knowledge. So he knows how many stars there are. He knows every detail of every square inch of the universe. But what I want us to focus on is the great truth that Psalm 139 presents to us, the fact that God knows you. Oh Lord, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up, you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, oh Lord, you know it all together. And that's reminding us that God's knowledge of you is inexhaustibly deep. So he knows your story. He knows your hurts. He knows your fears, your needs, your hopes, your dreams. He knows it all. Now, if God was like us, that would probably make us all feel very uncomfortable. So if you all knew everything about my life, my mistakes, my insecurities, the stupid things that I've said or thought or done, if you knew all that, then I think I would emigrate to the moon and never return. And that's why it's a really horrible thing when on social media, if someone makes a mistake, people just pile onto them and just highlight this mistake for the world to see. And I think it's so important that we remember that that's a, that's not, not a cool thing to do at all. Thankfully, God is not like us. And so yes, God knows us so deeply. But the reason he knows us so deeply is because he loves you so much. And that is why whenever you are vulnerable before God, you are never taking him by surprise. So often it's easy to think that, you know, there's something in my life that I'm really mucking up, or there's something that I've done that I really shouldn't.

And you think to yourself, you know, that, that's, you know, if I, if I talk to God about that, then he's just going to, he's not going to want to know me. But it's not like that. In fact, it's the complete opposite. You can't take God by surprise. And, and that's highlighted by the word that the New Testament uses for confession. The New Testament talks about confessing our sins to God. That's a brilliant word because it literally means to say the same thing. It means say the same thing. That's exactly what it means. So when we confess our sins to God, it's so easy to think that we're going to shock him into hating us forever. When the truth is, when we confess our sins to God, when we come to him in our weakness and our failings, we are simply telling him what he already knows. We're agreeing with him that we've made mistakes. And from that moment, we are on the path to healing. So as you go into a new year, as you go into a new week today, never, ever forget that God's knowledge of you is so deep.

He knows every email in your inbox. He knows every bill that you're, you're struggling to pay. He knows every shift that you don't want to go to at work. He knows every subject that you don't really like at school. He knows every insecurity that you face, every burden that you carry, every decision that you've got to take. God knows it all. And that's why you can go to work or school or, or, or to whatever you do every day, you can go into every single day with a brilliant prayer that is only two words long. You know. And as you pray that prayer to God and go into a new day saying, Lord, you know, you're just acknowledging the fact that he knows your needs and your worries and your concerns, and you're expressing your dependence upon him. His knowledge of you is so deep.

[16 : 27] So God's riches of kindness, grace, and patience are inexhaustibly deep. God's wisdom for dealing with all the problems that we face is inexhaustibly deep. And God's knowledge of you is so personal, so intimate, so loving. It is inexhaustibly deep. And then, to reinforce what he's been saying, Paul then asks two great questions in verses 34 and 35. These are actually quotations from Isaiah chapter 40 of 13 and Job 35 7. Paul says, for who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, or who has given him a gift that he might be repaid? These questions are reminding us that, that God's wisdom and knowledge is far, far deeper than ours. And that's reminding us of how we should view God. And that's a really important concept to think about at any point in life, but especially at the start of a new year, to think to yourself, well, how do I view God and how do I view the world around me? That's what we mean when we talk about our worldview. And it's really important that our worldview is shaped by the Bible. And one of the brilliant things about the letter to the Romans is that it gives us a very clear biblical worldview. Now, in order to explain this, I'm going to show you a picture, okay? So here is a picture. I hope you can see it at home, and I hope you can see it here. It's just two circles, a big one and a wee one. And this is a picture that, that theologians have used over the years to help illustrate the biblical worldview. So it's called the creator-creation distinction, big circle, wee circle. The big circle is the creator, God. The wee circle is the creation.

And so that means that in this wee circle is the whole of history. And in this circle is every square inch of the universe. And in this circle is every single human who has ever lived, along with everything else that has ever been made. So if you can imagine the tiniest, tiniest, tiniest little speck in that wee circle, that's you and me. And the reason that this diagram is helpful is because if you're going to put absolutely everything into that circle, the wee one, the whole of the universe, the whole of history, the whole of humanity, it's reminding us that God is way bigger. He is way bigger than everything.

And it's presenting to us just the immensity and vastness of God, and that he's in a category of his own, distinct from everything else that has ever been made. And Paul is, is, is, um, asking questions that, that, um, that reflect a worldview like this. Because he says, who's known the mind of God, or who can be his counselor? So if you imagine that you're a tiny wee dot in the wee circle, and think to yourself, do you know the mind of God? No. Or are you able to be God's counselor? In other words, are you a tiny wee dot able to tell God what to do? Of course not. And Paul is emphasizing that it's, it's, it's crazy to think that we could be God's counselor, that we could tell him what to do.

Or, as the second question says, who could give him a gift that might be repaid? Can a tiny dot in there give the creator a gift? Of course not. There's absolutely no way that we could give some gift to God, uh, that would leave him indebted, uh, to us. And so, when you see that diagram, you realize it's absolutely bonkers to think that you can tell God what to do. And it's crazy to think that we can bargain with God as though we have something that he needs, and that we can make him owe us something. It's absolutely absurd.

And yet we do it all the time. So people constantly think that they can tell God what to do. And so people will maybe say, you know, you know, why is God letting this happen in my life? Why isn't God getting rid of coronavirus?

[21 : 35] Why isn't God giving me a place in university that I want? Why isn't God making my job better? Why isn't God, um, showing me whether I should, uh, become a member of the church or not? Why isn't God doing these things to me? So we, we want God to remove everything from our lives that we don't like.

And yet at the very same time, we actually want God to allow us all the things in our lives that he doesn't like. And so when God instructs us in terms of our moral conduct, not to be quarrelsome, not to be gossiping, not to be jealous of others, not to be selfish, um, not to be judgmental, God is saying not to do all of these things. And yet we just kind of ignore that.

And, and yet we still want God to, to sort out the stuff that we don't like in our lives. In other words, we expect God to give us all his blessings. And at the same time, we want to be absolved from all responsibility. And some people also often think that we can repay God ourselves. So we sometimes think to ourselves, well, you know, if, if, if I'm going to be safe for eternity, if I'm going to be, um, saved from hell and brought into heaven, God will give me that because I've been a decent enough person. And that will be a good enough payment for God. And because of the stuff I've done on the, and the stuff I've not done, God will, will repay me, um, because God will reward me because I have paid him what I need to do. Please make sure you realize that both of these mindsets are deadly.

You cannot tell God what to do. He is God. So even, even the most basic common sense looking at that picture tells you that a tiny spot in there cannot tell God what to do. And a tiny spot in there cannot repay God. You cannot bargain with him. And you might think, well, that makes God sound harsh. It's not, that's not why we're saying this at all. The truth is you simply can't. It is just impossible.

And it's reminding us of a very important point. It's reminding us that God is not a barterer. Often life will come down to bartering. So if you do, if I do this, will you do that? If I give you this, will you give me that? So we'll look for the best deals in our purchases. We'll try, um, and get in there at work with a good impression with our colleagues or with our superiors. We'll aim to impress our friends in the hope that it'll give us a sense of worth. And we'll maybe try and use our powers of persuasion to get people to do, to do the stuff that we want them to do. And we can so easily think that we need to persuade God to save us, but we must never forget that God is not a barterer.

[24 : 46] And that, of course, means that God is never manipulated. You can never get the better of him in that sense. But even more importantly is that we must never think that we earn our salvation with God by some kind of deal. We cannot manipulate God or persuade him or bargain with him. And the amazing truth of the gospel is that you don't have to. Because the gospel is not about bartering. It is far, far better than that. It is, it is literally impossible for us to pay God for our salvation. And that is precisely why God does not ask us to pay. Instead, he offers salvation as a free gift.

And that's the gospel message, that God offers us perfect salvation as a free gift. It's not by works, it's not by our payment, it's not by our persuasion, it's all because of the free and abundant grace of God. And although we, as part of the creation, can never know the full mind of God, the creator, what we do know is what he's revealed to us. And what he's revealed to us is that he absolutely wants to save people like you. And there's a key truth that arises from all of this that I really want you to remember. What we're being reminded here is that you don't need to haggle for God's affection.

So often as Christians, we can think that we need to kind of impress God or repay God in some way for him to love us. And the fact that we muck up every week in our Christian lives, or if you're looking back over 2020, maybe you think, well, I've made a hash of my Christian life in that year. And you think that God must be so fed up of me. And we go into a new year feeling despondent and discouraged. And maybe you think, well, I hope that I can improve as a Christian this year. And then maybe God will be happier with me. And maybe God will love me more. It is so incredibly easy to feel like that. And yet it is utter theological rubbish. It is totally untrue. Because the truth is, God's love for you is already inexhaustibly deep. It's like an ocean. So if you imagine going up to God and standing by this deep ocean of his love, you don't say, Lord God, please can I buy a bit of this ocean and take it with me? You don't take a piece of ocean away with you. What do you do?

You just jump in. And that is what God's love is like. Imagine, try to imagine it's not winter on the west side of Lewis. And imagine it's a beautiful summer's day. And imagine the shore down at the Macher there is just glistening in the sunshine. And it's still. And the tiniest of waves are just lapping onto the shore. And the sun is warm. And the sea is refreshing. That is God's love for you. And you don't stand and think, oh, well, I'll take a tiny bucket of this home with me. You just, just walk in and fall in. And throw yourself into his love. And let it wash all over you.

That's why when you pray to God, when you read your Bible, when you come to worship at church, or whether you're watching at home, you're not coming to God. You're not coming to God's love as though it's like a dripping tap that you have to kind of just get a couple of drops of his love.

[29 : 04] Maybe if you're good enough, it is not like that at all. You're just jumping into the ocean. And you're letting his love wash over you. God's love for you is already there. And it's inexhaustibly deep. And he wants you to just enjoy it forever. Last of all, Paul says in verse 36, for from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

I just want to say one thing very briefly about this verse. Often when we read the Bible, we are drawn to the big words. There's lots of very cool big words in the Bible. And if you read the rest of Romans up to this point, there's loads of wonderful big words like justification, sanctification, redemption, adoption. The big words are brilliant, but never forget that the little words in the Bible are also brilliant. And there's three amazing little words in verse 36.

They're the words from, through, and to. And these words are an amazing reminder that from start to finish, our salvation is God's work. It's initiated from him. It's his plan, his initiative, his provision. It's accomplished through him. He paid the price.

He took our sins. He paid the debt. He made the sacrifice. He finished the work. And it's all leading to him. The great goal of a gospel message is the perfect fullness of worship and fellowship and family and unity and love in the presence of God forever. God does it all. He initiates it. He achieves it.

And he will consummate it. And he will consummate it on the last day. Our salvation and the whole of history is from him, through him, and to him. And what's the result of that? What does God get?

[31 : 10] He gets the glory. And rightly so, which is why Paul concludes that verse by saying, to him be glory forever. Amen. The fact that God has done it all means that he gets the glory. That's why there's no place for our own arrogance or pride or anything in the Christian gospel. It's all the amazing work of God. So he gets the glory. But if God gets the glory, what do we get? Well, often in life, when someone else gets glory, we feel insecure, don't we? So maybe at work, someone else does something really well. And you kind of think, oh, man, that makes me look rubbish. Or in school, maybe somebody else does really well on a test. And you maybe made a few silly mistakes. And you think, oh, why did I do that? And maybe, you know, in every part of life, it can happen. Someone else, you know, something great happens. Someone gets married or someone builds a nice house or someone has a child or something. And they get attention and they get glory. And it can make us feel insecure.

And it's so, so easy to feel like that. But that doesn't happen in the gospel. Because in the gospel, the fact that God gets the glory, the fact that everything is from him and through him and to him means that you are secure forever.

You are utterly secure and safe in Jesus because he has done it all. That's the amazing truth of becoming a Christian, that you're safe and secure because of everything that he has done.

God gets the glory. And for that reason, you can have eternal security. And a very dear friend of mine, I've heard him share his testimony a few times. And I love hearing it because he talks all about how God has worked in his life. And at the end of his testimony, he says, and do you know the best bit? God did it. God did it all. So when it comes to restoring you from your sin, when it comes to bringing you into God's family, when it comes to transforming you into everything you were created to be, when it comes to leading you through the highs and lows and the joys and the securities of life, when it comes to giving you eternal security that nothing can ever, ever take away, does God know what to do?

Too right, he does. And that is the best thing that we can take with us into 2021.

[34 : 06] To him be glory forever. Amen. Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you that from you and through you and to you are all things.

We thank you that you are the God whose riches and wisdom and knowledge are inexhaustibly deep. And we thank you that you are the God of immeasurable love and mercy.

And so we just, we just thank you for all that you've done in our lives. We pray that for every single one of us, we would go into 2021 with our eyes fixed on you.

Our closing psalm is Psalm 67 from the Scottish Psalter.

Again, those of us who are here, we will listen and think on these words as they are played. And those of you who are at home, we invite you to sing. Lord, bless and pity us.

[35 : 16] Shine on us with thy face, that the earth, thy way, and nations all may know thy saving grace. Psalm 67 to God's praise. Let me pray.

Lindsey's prayer, healery, and nations all may know thy mary.

Be long, thanks as we learn thyiqu'r. grace. Now trust in people judge on every nation's hope.

Let people praise thee, Lord, let them praise thee, O great and song.

The earth who shall hear our God shall bless him send.

[37 : 00] God shall us bless and shall him fear unto acts of woes stand.

Amen. We'll close with a benediction. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen.