

Oh The Wisdom of God Romans 11:33-36

We looked at this passage for a couple of weeks, the conclusion to the opening 11 chapters of the book of Romans. And we realize because of the truths that Paul has taught, and the truths that he has written down in the book of Romans his heart is full and he enters into doxology or praise of God for the immensity of the plan of salvation to sinful man, and he realizes that salvation is all a work of God and therefore God is to be praised and revelled and enjoyed. He just cannot contain himself. And that is what that first word means, "Oh." It means that our breath has been taken away by God's wisdom and glory and goodness to sinful man. One could have not only thought of the plan of salvation but had the power to enact it. Salvation does not speak of our worth or our glory but God's and God's alone.

And we saw how this last paragraph is structured - Paul names three attributes of God in verse 33 - his riches, wisdom and knowledge. And then he asks three rhetorical questions about these three attributes, and he asks them in reverse order, and then he ends the chapter and these magnificent 11 chapters with a praise statement where all of the praise goes to God alone. The last two weeks we looked at two of those attributes - but not in order. We looked at his riches. We realize God has made everything and also owns everything. But the riches here is signifying his riches in redemption. It is the strength and power of God to provide for us everything that is necessary in our salvation so that nothing is ever lacking. It is his in his grace and his ability to keep us.

And last time we were together we looked at his knowledge. And we describe God as having all-knowledge. It is comprehensive and right before God at all time. God knows about every sin that we have ever committed and every sin that I will ever commit. That is why it is such a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God - he knows us and he is able to bring the appropriate and just punishment for us our sin. He is also knows his worth perfectly which is important because all sin is first and foremost against him. But the glory here, is if he knows me perfectly, then he also is able to provide perfectly. He knows beyond any shadow of a doubt that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is more than enough for my sin debt. He knows that nothing therefore will separate me from the love of Christ. And that knowledge that used to engender the greatest fear has now become my greatest comfort - I now know that I am accepted in the beloved for evermore!

And that knowledge as we talked about last time is not just dry factual knowledge about us, but it is also relational knowledge. He has forever entered into a relationship with us. He is for us and will never stand against his children. It is a glorious truth because he knows what I need to live for him and grow in the likeness of Christ. And through the riches of his grace, he is able to provide just what I need to glorify and magnify Him.

And now this morning we come to another of God's incredible attributes that should take our breath away and cause us to be overwhelmed with who God is, should create a holy shudder and causal true hairs on the back of our heads to stand up. And there is a sense when we talk about the wisdom of God that it is like the other attributes of God in that it is so grand and high that it is incomprehensible. It is beyond

us to truly grasp and fully understand, but what we will do this morning and seek to look at what Paul writes and glory in this morning and try and expand our minds and hearts with the infinite glory of this great God. Again, the more we see God and the wonder of salvation the more we are drawn to him and the things of earth lose their sway in the light of his glory and grace.

1. We need to know what Paul means here by wisdom. V. 33

We often hear words but we are very slow to think about the meaning and significance of words. We all want to be known as wise people, but when we consider the wisdom of God, and are able to behold it in the Scriptures we realize how above his wisdom is than any of our puny wisdom. It causes us to be drawn toward him and trust him even when we do not know how things will turn out. I have learned that his ways are higher and more glorious and are the best. I can trust in him. 1Peter 4:19 says, **“Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”** We entrust ourselves to God knowing his ways are always best even when we cannot understand it. He has proven his wisdom through his word that it gives us such confidence in him in the here and now.

We realize the Scriptures over and over state that God is a wise God. The closing doxology of this book ends this way in Romans 16:27, **“to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”** He is the only wise God. Job 12:13 says, **“With God are wisdom and might; he has counsel and understanding.”** And we witness something of that wisdom in the creation around us. Psalm 104:24, **“O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”** Believers have looked and beheld the wisdom of God even in its fallen condition, how harmonious and intricate the various component of creation work together. It causes us to burst forth in praise to him.

Here the word wisdom almost seems like a similar word for knowledge, but hopefully we realize that it is so much more than knowledge. Wayne Grudem gives this helpful definition, **“God's wisdom means that God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals. This definition goes beyond the idea of God knowing all things and specifies that God's decisions about what he will do are always wise decisions: that is, they always will bring about the best results (from God's ultimate perspective), and they will bring about those results through the best possible means.”** A.W. Tower has this definition, **“Wisdom, among other things, is the ability to devise perfect ends and to achieve those ends by the most perfect means. It sees the end from the beginning, so that there can be no need to guess or conjecture. Wisdom sees everything in focus, each in proper relation to all, and is thus able to work toward predestined goals with flawless precision.”**

And I want us to understand that when we say that God works through the best possible means to bring about the best possible results, that those results can never be separated from God's other attributes such as his power that is able to bring them about. It would be one thing to want certain things to take place and even plan them but not be able to bring that plan to fruition. God acts in wisdom through his power to bring the best possible ends. It also cannot be separated from God's goodness. Wisdom is not slyness or being shrewd. Someone might be able to, through deception

and through cunning bring about their evil plans but that is not biblical wisdom even though they can manipulate others to do their will and accomplish their ends. God's wisdom is a good and holy and loving wisdom that is committed to his glory and the good of his people. God is always good. His ends are good, just and holy.

2. We need to understand the specific wisdom of God in this verse. V.33.

What specifically is Paul talking about here? And he is not talking about the beauty and glory of God that is always on display in creation, although that is something to behold. The wisdom that he is talking about is the wisdom that we find in the eleven chapters that we have gone through in the Book of Romans where Paul shows us the glory of God in our salvation. And If you are not left amazed and humbled and dumb-founded at the wisdom of God in saving sinners like you and me then you have not understood the last several years of preaching through this book. This is a book of awe, a book that stuns us with God. Salvation in one sense is so easy that even a child could understand yet so deep that no army of sages studying all of their lives can ever plumb the full depths of their glory and wisdom.

A. We see that wisdom through justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone. 1-5.

This section shows the universal nature of sin and that all are under the wrath of God. There are none righteous. There are none that can stand before an all righteous God and all deserve the wages of their sin, which is eternal death and punishment. Then we have one of the most significant and profound paragraphs in all the Scriptures in 3:21-26. In fact Martin Luther writes that this is possibly the most important paragraph in the Bible. Bible expositor Leon Morris even goes further and writes this is, "**possibly the most important single paragraph ever written.**" You think after statements like that we should know what it says and teaches. He says in verses 21-23, "**But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it- the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**" There is a righteousness that is not based on law righteousness or what we do. it is not based on works, which is good news because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Next he says in verse 24, "**and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**" Justification is a legal term. And we are told that we are justified not by works but by a grace gift, in other words something I do not deserve. It is based on the redemption of Jesus. And he explains how that redemption was accomplished in the next verse, "**whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.**" Propitiation is not a word that we use today, but it is a necessary biblical word. It means to placate or appease anger. We might placate the anger of our spouse by giving her flowers. But the problem here is I cannot propitiate God's anger. There is nothing I can do. Here is where grace comes in. God placates his own anger through the blood of his Son. The meaning of blood is that there was a violent and sacrificial death on our behalf. Look how it is received - "to be received by faith." Again not by works.

And look at what the substitutionary sacrifice shows - "God's righteousness." Do you see that. Now why did God have to display his righteousness? This is why, "because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." God had passed over sins. Noah got drunk. Abraham lied, Moses killed an Egyptian in anger, David - a man after God's own heart - committed adultery and murder. Now here is the question: how can God be righteous if these sins were not punished with the justice they deserve? If you are Uriah or Bathsheba's parents or relatives - you would say that God needs to judge David. Everlasting punishment sounds about right. He murdered my son, he took advantage of my daughter! How can God be just?

Listen to 3:26 and the outcome of the sacrifice of Christ, "**It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**" The sacrifice of Jesus on behalf of guilty sinners was to display in full wisdom and glory the righteousness at this present time. What is the outcome? He is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. That is the great conundrum - how can God be just and at the same time love and forgive and welcome sinners to himself? The answer is the cross. The answer is justification by faith in Christ alone. He is both just - no one can accuse God of being unrighteous. Sin has been punished exhaustively through the sacrifice of Jesus, and therefore God can also justify the ungodly. It is where his justice and righteousness meet.

Now here is the question: who could have ever thought of a plan like that? We think that God can be either loving and forgiving but not just, or he is just and righteous and therefore cannot ever welcome sinners. God's wisdom sends us to our knees to marvel at his righteousness and love. Have you seen that? Do you say, "Oh! - the depths of his wisdom" as you behold the God who justifies us.

B. Not only that but we see the wisdom of God in our sanctification. 6-8.

Chapters 6-8 handle the glorious wisdom of God sanctifying us or changing us more and more into the image of Christ. And let me just bring up a couple of things about the glory and wisdom of God here. One is that the accusation that is made against the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus alone, that Jesus has done it all, and there is nothing more that needs to be done is that it will lead to lawlessness among any and all who believe that truth. If Jesus died for sinners and all is done then it does not matter how I live. I can live like the devil and expect heaven. And when I do, it will make the grace of God even shine that much greater in the life of the sinner.

Listen to how Paul answers that accusation in Romans 6:1-4, "**What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.**" Paul says that we have died to sin, and at the same time been given new life in Jesus Christ. And here is the outcome of justification, and that is our sanctification. We start to become like Christ. This is all the work of God, but this is how you know that a person really has gotten the message of justification in Jesus alone - they realize the cost of sin and the glory of what Christ has done for them. It is the exact opposite of

living in sin. They want to follow Christ, love Christ, learn of Christ and be like him. He is their new Lord, and they want to follow him not sin. You see this among new believers. New believers never say, "Oh, now that I am justified I can continue in my sin and I can sin all the more." No, sin has become ugly, something that Jesus died to pay for, and holiness has become beautiful. There is a glorious change in direction. And when we see that drastic change, we never praise the believer - we praise the God of that believer. Logically, it is not what we expect, but we see the wisdom of God in our sanctification.

We also see the wisdom of God throughout all of our lives in our sanctification or changing us to look at Christ. We looked and beheld Romans 8:28 for a number of Sundays, "**And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**" The word of God says all things, not most or many but everything in the life of the believer works together for good. What is the good? The good is the highest good and that is the glory of God. God in his wisdom orchestrates the highest good in your life and my life even through the deepest valleys and excruciating times of suffering in our lives. And what is the highest good? He explains in verse 29, "**For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.**" He has predetermined that we would be conformed and changed into his image of his Son. Now can you think of any greater purpose or any greater plan that God could have for your life or mine? And much of that plan is unique to us, in other words no two plans are identical.

And many of you can look back at the greatest pain that you have had in your life and you have seen how God has changed you in the midst of that pain. It might be to destroy sin or see the glory of Christ. You can actually look back and thank God for the pain because you have seen what God in his providential wisdom has done in your life and in your relationship with him. Some of that pain and suffering is still a mystery, but you can't count on God that he is using it for his glory and our good. I often think of all the decisions that God had to control in order for me to be right here today in this moment in history and saying these things, and it causes my head to hurt. Think of all the random moments of everything from traffic, to the lines in the grocery store, to the squabble of the children, to trouble getting to sleep, to financial concerns every day of every week of every year, and God controls them all for my good and his glory. What wisdom is needed for that in every single child of his? Again, the wisdom of God is incomprehensible- it is past finding out and plumbing its depths.

And I am going to end it there, and we have not even talked about God's elective decrees in eternity past, and human responsibility, and God's future for Israel.

But let me end with one challenge. If you behold God's wisdom and you are in awe of that wisdom that it causes God to be so grand and glorious, let me ask this question: where are you going to go for wisdom? It is incredible how often we are trying to figure out life, marriage, parenting, emotions, anger problems with secular wisdom rather than coming to the God of all wisdom and realize that he has given us everything that we need for life and godliness. As we are amazed at his wisdom through all of life let us ask him for his wisdom to live lives for his glory, and let us be zealous to seek that wisdom in his word.