

The Smallness of Man and the Bigness of God Romans 11:33-36

We have had a marvellous time going through these verses at the end of Romans 1 through 11, Paul's Magnus Opus on the doctrine of salvation. And as Paul ends off, he ends off in praise and adoration to God. He ends glorying in who God is because of what he has done. Salvation and the glory of salvation speaks of the character of God. And we have gone through verse 33 for the last several weeks, and we have noted that Paul glories in three attributes of God - his riches, wisdom, and knowledge. And then he says that God's ways are so glorious and grand that they are past finding out for us. And as we meditate on God we are brought to delight in him and have a bedrock of trust in him no matter what we are going through. And the reason why is he becomes greater and bigger than anything that we face in life.

And now this morning we come to verses 34-35, and Paul asks three questions, and they are about the attributes that he has just mentioned, but he handles them in reverse order. He handles them talking about his knowledge and the wisdom and then his riches. But there is something else that is different in these two verses because he not only just renames them but the questions are comparisons. He compares God with us through these quotes from the Old Testament. And the whole reason for this is to show how small and insignificant and puny we are compared to God. It is meant to cause us to gasp in glory of who God is and how different he is from us.

And we know this but when we see things that are big, and we have that feeling of insignificant we glory in the grandeur of what we see. So when you go to Niagara Falls, you stare at the falls and you are brought to glory in the size but also the power and the beauty of what you are seeing. You take picture after picture to capture the beauty and glory of the falls. When you go to the Rockies, you stop and sense that glory because in the presence of such beauty and bigness you realize how small and insignificant you are. In those times that we are brought to see our smallness and the grandeur of what we see and sense there are no light thoughts or small conversation, and there is also a sense of the emotion of wonder and delight and glory. This is what the knowledge of God does. It sends that sense of glory in us that we are far less significant and that God is so far beyond us and above us in all his attributes.

Theologians many times divide up the attributes or characteristics of God between his communicable and incommunicable attributes. His communicable ones are the ones that are communicable to us. We share in some way the love, or knowledge or wisdom of God. The other incommunicable attributes are things that we cannot and do not share. They are what puts God in another category. It might be that he is present everywhere, or has all power, or that he is eternal. We can understand some attributes because we share in them to a certain degree and the others we can describe but really not understand because we do not share.

But right here, as Paul asks these questions, we realize all God's attributes are incommunicable in the sense that his love, knowledge and wisdom are so big, grand and glorious he is another category that is so beyond us that we cannot enter in on. He is impeccable and perfect and holy and beyond us in those perfections. So to compare our strength, and stature and grandeur with Niagara Falls or the Rockies would be absolutely foolish, but to compare ourselves with God in any attribute would be the

height of lunacy. Man wants to bring God down. The Scripture reveals the true glory of the one that cannot be contained by our finite minds. He is infinite. He is glorious. He is big and we are not. And the more we realize this truth, the more it really does change us. Are you glorying and revelling in the size, grandeur and glory of God? Do you stand back and say - Oh!? Let us look at these questions and behold our God.

1. The first question deals with how little we know. v. 34.

It is amazing how quickly we increase our knowledge of God when we come to Christ. We want to know God because we love God. And wherever true Christianity has been heralded, the level of education has always increased in that area and among those who are believers. The reason is they want to know God. If they cannot read they want to learn to read so that they can read the Scriptures. But there is a problem with knowledge. Paul names it in 1Cor. 8:1-2, **“Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that ‘all of us possess knowledge.’ This ‘knowledge’ puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.”** They had a knowledge that food was just food even food offered to idols. But what that knowledge created in them was pride. Look at how great our knowledge compared to some, even other believers. And this knowledge caused them to look down on others.

So how does this work? We all want the knowledge of God but we do not want to become proud and haughty because we have this knowledge. And the way it works is that this knowledge of God and increasing knowledge as we study the Scriptures is meant not to cause us to be proud but actually humble us, and the way it humbles us is by comparing ourselves by God and his knowledge and not the knowledge of others. By comparison we are just incrementally different than others even if we are more knowledgeable than others. But God is in another category all on his own. His knowledge is beyond us. We can state the truth that God knows everything, or that there is nothing that he does not know, but to truly understand the meaning of what we have stated is beyond us.

Look at what Paul says here, **“For who has known the mind of the Lord.”** Now there are three rhetorical questions here. And the answer to all three is no one. Who knows God’s mind? No one. Who has been his counsellor? No one. Who gives to God that it might be repaid? No one. And this the first and second questions are taken from Isaiah 40:13. It is part of a larger section that rehearses God’s greatness, and if you are unfamiliar with Isaiah 40, you really need to study that portion of Scripture. Listen to Isaiah 40:13-17, **“Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust. Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering. All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.”** What Isaiah is saying is stand in wonder and amazement at who God is.

Often we feel that we know more than the Lord although we would not say it that way. The second question that is offered up here in this passage is one dealing with wisdom. It says, **“or who has been his counsellor?”** And we answer again, and say no one. But as Israel is going through oppression because of their enemies and they see this as unjust and God as treating them in an unrighteous and unfair way, listen to their complaint in the middle of that chapter in Isaiah 40:27, **“Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God’?”** Do you ever feel that your way, your life and the events of your life are hidden from God? In your anger or despondency do you ever feel that God is not even aware of you? The complaint in the verse is “my right is disregarded by my God.” What is right and just is disregarded by the Lord meaning he pays no attention and gives no thought to. He does not take up the thought and may not even know about it, or want to know about it.

At the heart of this complaint is that I know more about God and I can counsel him on how he should orchestrate my life. Have you ever been there? And if so how do we get over it? The way that we get over it is to realize how puny our knowledge is. Listen to the verses that come right before that complaint in Isaiah 40: 25-26, **“To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of his might and because he is strong in power, not one is missing.”** I love this chapter in Isaiah because it brings out question after question to cause us to think. If you doubt the knowledge and wisdom of God he says look up. Who created them? The answer is God. He has them all numbered and knows each one intimately by name. And takes such care of them not one of them is missing. We think our life is somehow hidden from God?

Think of the sheer number. Sam Storms writes in his book, One Thing, **“Our sun, a mere 864,000 miles in diameter, is actually a bit puny, as stars go. Comparatively tiny though it be, you could line up more than 100 earths, each touching the next, and still not span the diameter of the sun. You can make 333,000 earth sized planets from the matter in the sun. Whereas the surface temperature is 5,500° C, its central temperature is 15,000,000 degrees Celsius. Ouch! Astronomers have been especially focused on one of the biggest stars in our galaxy known as Eta Carinae (pronounced either ‘ate-a car-eye-nee’ or ‘etta car-a-nie’). This star lies in the far southern sky and can’t be seen from much of the northern hemisphere. The diameter of Eta Carinae is a bit more than 400 million miles. If it stood in for our sun it would swallow up all the planets out to Mars! It’s only 7,500 light years away in a spiral arm of the Milky Way.”** Do you ever feel puny when you look up?

James Montgomery Boice writes this story, **“William Beebe (1877–1962) was a biologist, explorer, and author, and he was also a personal friend of Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), the twenty-sixth president of the United States. He used to visit Roosevelt at Sagamore Hill, his home near Oyster Bay, Long Island, and he tells of a little game they used to play together. After an evening of talk, they would go outside onto the lawn surrounding the great house and search the sky**

until they found the faint spot of light beyond the lower left corner of the great square of Pegasus. One of them would recite: 'That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as the Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun.' Then Roosevelt would grin at Beebe and say, 'Now I think we are small enough! Let's go to bed.'"

God knows them all by name. Isaiah says, do feel forgotten by God? Look up! Think you can tell God something that he does know? For who has known the mind of the Lord? The answer is no one. That feeling of smallness does not make us sad and lonely and awful. In the modern teaching of self-esteem we have to think we are great. But the feeling of smallness that humbles us before this grand God creates joy and confidence and trust in God.

And the other half of that verse deals with the wisdom of God - the ability to assimilate all that knowledge to come up with the best possible ends through the best possible means. Listen to these verses right after the complaint that God does not know or he has disregarded his justice towards me, Isaiah 40:28-3, "**Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.**"

Isaiah, instead of questioning God's knowledge and wisdom questions the people's knowledge and wisdom, "Have you not known? Have you not heard?" The Lord is in a category all on his own. He is everlasting. We cannot understand eternity because we can only think in time, and everything must have a beginning. He is the Creator who sustains everything, and the delicate balance that is needed to maintain life is amazing and yet our God maintains that. And he never grows weary. His strength is never dissipated or used up. Again, we can describe much of this but God is beyond us.

And then Isaiah says this - "His understanding is unsearchable." These are humbling verses for proud and know it all people. His understanding of how all things fit together and how they work together for our good and his glory is beyond us to truly comprehend. We look back at human history and how it took fifteen hundred years of human history for the Jews before Messiah would come. And why did it take so long? Or why didn't it take longer? It is because "His understanding is unsearchable." It is beyond us to truly comprehend all of the decisions and all of the turns in history that he planned that as Paul says in Galatians 4:4, "**But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.**"

God sent forth his son when? "When the fullness of time had come." It speaks of plan and knowledge and wisdom. Whole generations and kingdoms came and went and God was moulding his plan. It is humbling to think that we are just one small cog in the plan of God and we are not the main cog or one of the main cogs. When we even look at that long expanse of history and God's knowledge and wisdom to bring to pass the coming of the Saviour at a particular time, do we really think that God's knowledge and wisdom is not great enough to include us, or that we have been forgotten, or our lives are just too complex

and complicated for God to have any reason of plan? It is the height of pride and arrogance in any one of us to think that.

So what response should we have? Remember Israel according to Isaiah would go through dark days of captivity where all would seem lost. But he gives this vision of God, this bigness of God to cause us to glory in who he is. And again, listen to how the chapter ends in Isaiah 40:31, **“but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”** The call is to wait upon the Lord. But what does it mean to wait? It means to remain in a place before acting or saying something. People sometimes say I couldn't wait any longer, I had to act or I had to speak. Here waiting is not inactivity but waiting for the Lord means that I endure in trusting him. I enduring in following him regardless of the circumstances and situations. I have heard people who have said, “I am done, I will not forgive or have anything else to do with that person.” And in those moments we are calling into question the knowledge and wisdom of God. What does faith do that has this great, big, huge God? Faith waits for the Lord. And what does God do? He doesn't say that he changes all their circumstances but he renews their strength allowing them to walk and not faint.

Isn't it true? When God is as big and as knowledgeable and wise as the book of Romans says, when God is as big and immense and glorious as Isaiah 40 says then there is a joy and a trust in God that envelops our lives and our hearts that circumstances and people cannot control. When other people and circumstances are big and God is seen to be small in our estimation, that is when we fret, worry, and exhaustion, and fatigue enter in. When we are big, all of life - what people think and do and say are all under our control or just dumb luck, but when God is in control orchestrating and directing all of life beyond my capacity to see and realize all that he is doing, then there is trust, waiting, strength and joy in my life.

So here is the question I pose this morning: how big is God? How small are you? Do you consider yourself just a little below God, he is great but not that great? He does need help and counsel sometimes. Or do you see that he is in a category all of his own. There is God then everyone else. He doesn't need you and me. He doesn't need our wisdom or counsel. And he is a God that can be trusted with our eternal destiny through Jesus Christ, but he is a God that can be trust with my here and now. Oh Christian, meditate on him. God through this praise statement of Paul. Go through Isaiah 40 and revel in the God of our redemption and wait upon him.