

Doxology

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[0 : 0 0] Just for a little while tonight, I want to think about the doxology that we are given in Romans 11, which we read together from verse 33.

O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out and so on to the end of that chapter.

I thought it would be good just for a few minutes to think a little bit about the nature and character of God as we come to the end of a year and as we seek to in our lives, as Neil was saying, not just for the hour we are in church, but in our lives generally, that we live lives that are worshipful and recognise who God is and what he has done for us and what we owe to him, particularly as we recognise and understand his grace to us in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

This comes at a really important division of the book. It comes kind of in the middle of the book, not exactly in the middle of the book, but it comes at an important division.

It's like Paul is just stopping at this point just to take a deep breath. He's given some really meaty stuff in the first 11 chapters of Romans and he's spoken about our condition, he's spoken about the character and the nature of God and he's spoken about salvation and there's a lot of stuff in it and it's quite intense and it's quite deep and it's quite strong theology, strong teaching that he's giving.

[1 : 4 1] But as if he stops here and he just takes a breath before moving on to really practical stuff about the truth then and how it applies to the life of the church, the church in Rome and what it means, the practical outworking of the gospel, of the truth of the gospel.

But in between these two things, there's this little sandwich, it's filler, it's little doxology, it's a little bit of praise that is given to God and it's a little bit like if you've, well generally Scotland but I'm sure anywhere else as well where there's mountains.

You've taken a long time to climb a mountain and it's been tough and you know it's really taken a lot out of you to get there but when you get to the top, you just stop and you take in the view and it's awe-inspiring and it's majestic and it's glorious before you go back down and do, well sometimes people think the easy bit are going down the hill but if you're an old man like me with bad knees then going down the hill is actually harder than going up the hill and I think sometimes that's true of the practical outworking of our Christian lives that sometimes we think it's the easy bit but it's maybe the harder bit and the easy bit is kind of getting fat on all the theological truth that sometimes we like to.

So there's this break as it were before Paul goes into the practical stuff where he just praises God, words of praise, that's really what doxology means, it's just a stopping to give praise, to worship God for who he is and it's a short section that's drawn from some of it at least from different parts of the Bible as well as he reflects on the nature and the character of God.

In other words God is worthy of worship just because of who he is, also because of what he's done but just because of who he is he's worthy of our worship.

[3 : 48] There's nothing really new in it but it's as if he's been examining God and speaking about God in the first 11 chapters and unfolding a little bit about the character of God and what he's like and what our need is of him and what he's come to do and he's done all these things and he's been focused for so much and he just lifts his head and it's almost like he feels he doesn't know anything, there's just so much, all he can do is kind of praise God and in a sense kind of shrug his shoulders, he's just amazing even though he has said so much, it's almost like he's at the very beginning, it's a bit like examining a beach by just examining one grain of sand, you examine that for ages, think of everything you know and then you just look up and there's miles of beach in front of you, it's just that you haven't even begun to understand the nature and the character of God and it's a little bit like that for Paul as he thinks of the nature of God.

At the end of John's Gospel John tells us about the birth, the life and the death of Jesus and it's told, written so that we might believe who Jesus is and put our trust in him which we have done if we are Christians.

At the very end of it Jesus did many other things as well, if every one of them were written down I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. It's just like even the little you know, oh I think we know so much about him and yet it's just a tiny little bit, there's just so much more that could be written about God and sometimes we just end up worshiping him even though we know so little about him, he can't be exhausted, our knowledge of him can't be exhausted, can never really get the stage where we say, ah I know all there is to know about God, yeah I've learned everything in the Bible, I know the A to Z of systematic theology is even then we're only scratching the surface because he's eternal and he's this magnificent character and his depth is almost too great for us even to comprehend, he can't be contained, he can't be boxed in, he can't be marked off, he's just this great powerful sovereign Lord and God and so Paul praises him, he says oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God, he speaks about just God in his richness, in the beauty of his character, all the good things we see, all the good things we enjoy, all the amazing realities in this world, the order, the beauty and the love all emanate from him, all source from him, all come from him as the one who is the creator of all these things and they all come from his character, his multi-dimensional character that is glorious and beautiful and as believers, as Christians, the core of what we are as Christians is relationship with him, isn't it, is knowing him, is loving him, is trusting him, is learning about him because of what he's done and that should for us, it shouldn't be and I know what often is, I know it is for me anyway sometimes but it should never be boring.

Our Christian walk, our Christian life should never really be dull because he's this phenomenal, uncontainable character who can always be examined, can always be learned from and understood more and more and more and we can always be learning about it, it's terrible really that we make him so dull isn't it, we make God really dull, we find sports stars or music stars or other people much more fascinating than God but that's crazy isn't it, we allow that to be the case that we drag ourselves into his presence but we skip into the presence of other mortals like ourselves and yet he is this great God who has a depth of riches that we can never really plumb fully, he is great as we're told here wisdom and knowledge, we see that wisdom and knowledge reflected in the world in which we live, in the order and mathematical precision of the universe, now I could go through all these amazing facts about if the earth tilted one millimetre another way it would dull burn up and all these things that I don't know anything about because I'm not scientific but they're there, incredible intricacy and the wisdom and the knowledge of God in the way he's created and the complexity of the human body and of the human mind that we do take for granted a lot of the times even our ability, all the abilities we have our ability to communicate, to speak with one another, to walk, to run, to sit, to smile, to laugh, all these things that are just absolutely plain to us are remarkable when we think about them, when we take the time to think about them and even the greatest inventions that we have made as human beings can ever match the glory of what God has created in our own bodies and in our own lives, the variety of all of that.

Someone recently on Facebook put a, when he's highly magnified photographs of a snowflake beautifully precise, beautifully ordered and yet completely unique to the next one that falls and even in the many things that we never find and that we explore but never understand we see God's hand in all of that, his wisdom and his knowledge in the world that he's created and in the humanity that he's created, what confidence we should have in his guidance and in his help but he's also one whose judgments are unsearchable, whose decisions we don't fully understand but yet are perfect in all his justice.

[10 : 45] It's hugely significant that we trust God and we trust God in his judgments because he is the judge of humanity, we will all stand to give account before the judge.

We're not just accountable to one another, we're not just accountable to our boss, we're not just accountable to our family, we're accountable ultimately we will stand before God, we will all stand before God and his judgments will be absolutely perfect and right.

Even though sometimes they are unsearchable to us, in other words we can't fully understand them, we still believe them. But the important reality of that is that none of us will stand before God on that day on which we give account and be accepted by Him in the light of our own lives and our own apparent efforts and goodness but everyone who comes to Jesus on that day, comes to God on that day through Jesus Christ and through his redemptive sacrifice on our behalf will be absolutely, completely accepted and we need to simply believe that his unsearchable judgments are right and within that we see that his paths are beyond tracing out, beyond prediction.

How often has that happened in your life that you thought that you could second guess what God's going to do or you've kind of prayed to Him and said, this is exactly what you need to do for me and my life God and He's taken you a completely different direction.

Sometimes He's brought darkness or difficulty or struggles into your life that you certainly wouldn't look for, you certainly wouldn't ask for but as you look back on these things reflectively you can see the reason why He's done this and you can see that His paths were absolutely right but are not what could be predicted.

[12 : 49] I wonder even if the angels, you know we talk a lot about the angels at this time of year at the birth of Jesus, when Jesus comes down and they praise the newborn baby, if the angels had any concept at that point that this Christ who was the Messiah, who was to be the King of Kings was going to be the King of Kings via the cross, that he was going to be despised and rejected, that he was going to be nailed to a tree, that he was going to die and that on the third day he would be raised from the dead.

That is His inscrutable path that He has chosen and it is the right path and the only path for salvation and for hope and for life and we are duty bound to remember that, we are encouraged to trust in Him for salvation through His atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary for our sins because His paths are beyond tracing out but they are absolutely right.

If Christ the perfect Son of God wept in the Garden of Gethsemane and said to God, if there's another path that you can take me on in order to achieve what I want to achieve for saving my people, please show me it because I don't want to go the way of the cross.

Do you think that God wouldn't have shown him if there was another way, an easier way? And if God says that, then who are we to question Him?

The path of the cross is the path that His death brings us life. The punishment that was laid on His shoulders brings us freedom and forgiveness and hope and eternal life.

[14 : 44] The sting of death that He received has been such that the sting of death is removed from us so that we, even though we die, yet will we live and that is a great reason to give thanks.

So, He then, having praised the judgments and the paths and the wisdom and the knowledge of the character of God, He then goes and asks two ludicrous questions, two sides in many ways of the same coin.

He says, who is known the mind of the Lord or who has been His counsellor and then who is ever given to God that God should repay Him. So in the light of what He is praising God for and what He's spoken about God in the previous 10 and a half, 11 chapters, He just asks these two questions and they're very important as we finish off with these questions.

Can we be wiser than God? In the light of His character, in the light of His perfection, of His infinity, of His divinity, of His all-knowing, all-seeing, all-powerful reality that He is, can we be wiser?

Who is known the mind of the Lord? Who has been His counsellor? In other words, do we go into God's presence and do we know better than God? Now you cannot say, well, obviously we're not going to know better than God.

[16 : 03] God knows better than anyone. But isn't that often how we live? Do we often not say, well, if I were God, I wouldn't do it this way and we go into God's presence and say, God, what are you doing?

You simply aren't acting in the right way. You're not dealing with me in my life. Why is God treating me like this? Because we feel that we know better than God.

We scrabble about so often in our lives, our short, ever-passing lives bound by death, and yet so often we lured out over the Creator and we tell Him that really we know better and that particularly if we ignore Him and reject Him, we're saying, well, I'm sure that was great what Jesus did on the cross, but I don't really need it.

It's not really for me. I'm sure it's for other wicked and bad people who need forgiven, but certainly not for me. And when Jesus says that we all need redemption, then He's just been crazy mad.

We know better than God. We can counsel God. We can tell Him that we know better. And yet the reality is for us that we don't.

[17 : 24] We're created. He's the Creator. And He's the Creator who in His great love and condescension died in the cross to set us free because He loves us and because He wants us to have life.

And He wants us to bow the knee now in worship because we will bow the knee one day. But it won't be in loving adoration in worship.

So that question is, can we be wiser than God? No. But also can we, can God be indebted to us who is ever given to God that God should repay Him?

Often we think in our lives the same way that, well, God owes me this. God owes me a good life. And we maybe ignore Him in our lives till things go wrong and we look heavenwards and say, well, why are you doing this to us?

Ever have I done wrong for you? You owe me health. You owe me good relationship. You owe me adhesion marriage. You owe me wealth.

[18 : 33] And if I come along and believe, then I'm doing you a favour, God, to come and believe as if our belief is really a favour to God.

And that by following Him we deserve heaven. We deserve something from Him. He owes us that place. He owes us that eternal life.

And yet again in the reality of God's Word and the reality of our hearts when we know them and the reality of the cross, what we see is a God who we saw this morning when we looked at the prodigal son, is a God who comes to us when we didn't really ask for Him and who died for us when we rejected Him and who offers us life even though we have done nothing to deserve that and offers us His grace and His goodness, an unmerited favour and acceptance.

We've not done anything to deserve it. Of all people, Christians should be humble and non, okay, it's not a very good phrase, non self-righteous.

We should be the most humble, the least self-righteous people, the least moralistic people in the universe. That's what we should be because we understand that God doesn't owe us anything.

[19 : 55] But by His grace, by His mercy, He has given us everything even though we didn't, He's not indebt to us. As Christians, you know, there's nothing we can do that will ever repay what He has done on our behalf.

And that's the good news of the gospel. That's the good news of this season. It's the good news that we believe will turn the hearts and lives of people in Edinburgh that will move them beyond simply living for the weekend or living till Friday night and living for the next party or living whatever it is and raise the sense of dignity of their lives beyond that, beyond just the next paycheck or beyond the next ambition and raise it to see how valuable we are because of what Jesus has done for us and freely given to us forgiveness and hope and eternal life.

And a response, a response to that ought to be worship. From Him and through Him and to Him and all things to Him be the glory. Where are we from?

Well, we're from God, aren't we? How can we live through God and through Jesus Christ? Why should we live?

We should live for God because we were made by Him. Our very life and our purpose is bound up in our Creator, is bound up in our Redeemer, is bound up in our Savior.

[21 : 21] And meaning in life comes from relationship with God and worshipping God in His infinite glory. You see, we all worship.

Every one of us are just insatiable worshipers. Whatever it is we worship very often, it's ourselves, but He made us to worship and to worship Him because He's worthy, He's both transcendent but also imminent.

He's close. He's close in the person of Jesus and He loves us. And He wants us to be reconciled to Him and to worship Him.

And true worship is inspired by theology, by truth. See this short doxology comes at the end of a really deep, a pretty deep section of theological truth.

It's absurd to say, oh, don't give me theology, just give me nice feelings or something. Because it's theology, it's the knowledge of God that enables us to worship Him.

[22 : 30] It's absurd without truth to try and worship because worship just then becomes vacuous and empty and self-indulgent and idolatrous and just a human experience.

It's unless we know the God that we worship through Jesus, then our worship is empty and meaningless. So worship is inspired by this knowledge of God and particularly by the knowledge of God through Jesus Christ and through His sacrifice in the cross.

And that is the only way we can worship Him, particularly by taking Him as our own saviour and redeemer, giving thanks for the life that we've had up till now and committing the life that we hope and believe we have ahead of us to His care and protection and that we would live for His glory.

So I hope that we can do that in our lives and that for Him and through Him and to Him that we would recognise everything exists, you have not one iota of independence, that it all is from and through and to Him.

And so the glory should be given to Him and it can only be given to Him if we are reconciled with Him and forgiven of our sins which separate us from Him.

[23 : 54] And that comes through Jesus Christ, our Lord and saviour. And our worship will reflect that knowledge and reflect our ability to praise Him.

So let's bow our heads briefly and pray before singing a parting song. Lord help us to worship You in spirit and in truth, to give You words of praise because we know who You are and yet the praise itself will be a bit like Paul's praise here.

It will be almost an acknowledgement of Your unsearchableness and Your amazing glory that is almost beyond words and help us to recognise that and be in awe.

We know that we live in a society and a day where there is very little awe and respect for anything. And people can stick their fingers up at God very easily because He seemed so far away and so in many people's estimation disinterested.

Lord, may they see the depth of His interest, Your interest in them, in the commitment of giving His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life.

[25 : 19] And may that truth from so long ago remain living and vibrant because it doesn't change and our need doesn't change and our lostness doesn't change.

So may we worship You from the knowledge of God and from the glory of knowing Jesus and may therefore it be vibrant and meaningful.

And help us to be worshipers this year. For Jesus' sake, amen.