

Intro

Good morning my people! I want to send a quick shoutout to everyone who is viewing this service online. I'm incredibly thankful that all of you joined us this morning. It's been a minute hasn't it? Last time you saw me up here, I was showed you my drawing of an abomination of a cow and I compared the looks and musical talents of Mark Monroe to David. Not sure this time will be quite as adventuresome but it's early in the day,

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Pastor Buddy James and I have the privilege of being the Pastor of Junior High Ministry here at Foothills. Before I dive in can I start with a personal story? Good because you have no choice. The Monday after I preach, I'll take the day off, flip on the TV and watch the recorded sermon. It's just how I function. One of the best ways I learn is to take pen and paper and write notes on the various aspects of preaching.

I happen to be the father of 3 children but at the time of my last sermon I only had 2. Anyway, I turn on the TV and instantly my 1.5 year old (at the time) walks up excited that I might be playing one of her favorite shows. I told her that Daddy was going to watch church and she wanted to watch it with me. When I show up on the camera she gets so excited. She looks at me in disbelief and then to the TV. Then points at me and shouts "Daddy!" then points to the TV "TV!". "Daddy! TV!" Is all she can say for almost a minute. She was star struck.

After about a minute of being the star of the home, she then proceeded to play with her toys as I'm taking notes watching myself deliver the sermon. 10 minutes pass by and she then says 2 more words. She points to the TV and says "TV" then points to me "off". I tell her that I'd

like to finish the message and she only repeats "TV" and "off" one or two more times before silently going back to what she was doing. Then 5 minutes pass by and she, this time in desperation; shouts at me "TV!" points at me "off!" After I told her that I'm going to watch the sermon she then threw herself on the floor, inconsolable screaming "TV!" "Off!" "TV!" "Off!" I then turned off the message and finished later. Preaching can be an incredibly humbling thing.

That had 0 to do with today's message but I figure my humbling experience isn't a bad way to start off. Today we're continuing our series *What's God Like* taking a look at the attributes of God, what He's like, and how He relates to us. The idea behind this series is the better we understand who God is and what he's like, the more likely we are to devote ourselves to trusting, following, spending time and living for His glory. The hope is that by possessing a healthy understanding of who God is and how he operates we can see practical impact in the lives of our congregation: in the way we think, feel and connect with Him in our daily lives

Our reading today will focus on Romans 11:33-36. Now as you flip open to Romans 11, I'd like to provide some context for what we'll be reading. Romans 11 is the tail end of Paul's doctrinal writing where he deals with topics such as justification, righteousness, faith and salvation. Now in the last 3 chapters, nine, ten & eleven; he deals with some of the heaviest hitting areas of theology. One of those weighty topics would be God's attribute of sovereignty and how it plays into salvation. To which he says a lot of weighty and deep things worth contemplating. Before I give you a layout of Romans 9-11 I wanted to give a definition for God's attribute of sovereignty. The definition for sovereign is possessing supreme or ultimate power. A Biblical understanding of God's sovereignty will be made more clear as we look at these passages.

The general layout for Romans 9-11 is as follows:

- Chapter 9 - details Israel's rejection of righteousness by faith and God's sovereign mercy

- Chapter 10 - Israel rejects the good news of Jesus
- Chapter 11 - God's partial, temporary and purposeful rejection of Israel

See what I mean weighty and deep? Paul concludes the doctrinal section of the book with a doxology. A Doxology can be understood by breaking down what the name means:

Doxa - the greek word used to translate the Hebrew word for glory (kāḇôḏ). Doxa means the glory, weight, esteem or honor of God. The second part of the word is Logos - the greek for word or speaking. A Doxology is an expression of praise to God.

As I was preparing the sermon I broke this doxology into individual parts and looked at each of the individual praises. I look at this doxology from two perspectives:

1. Is that Paul's response to God's sovereignty over salvation is a word of praise
2. The focus of this word of praise is on God's sovereign character

Each of these individual praises fit into both of these perspectives. Paul gives praise as a response to the doctrine of God's sovereignty over salvation while simultaneously giving admiration to God's sovereign character.

Depth of Riches: Wisdom & Knowledge

The first individual praise in verse 33 states:

"Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God

Paul begins by attributing praise to the level of wisdom and knowledge that God possesses. Paul is putting a bow tie on several arguments he's made from the last couple of chapters and he begins with the God's insurmountable wisdom and knowledge. He sees the issue people might take with some of His theological positions on God's mercy

and how it's given but he starts right off with God's wisdom and insight being superior to man's.

A good way of better understanding God's sovereignty over salvation is to use the same method Paul does in this doxology: compare the characteristics of God's sovereignty to man's capacity. In the instance of wisdom and knowledge, we see that **man is subject** to limited knowledge and reliant on experience and outside influence for wisdom and knowledge.

God works at an ability beyond human comprehension; his insight is perfect without any unknown. We operate almost exclusively out of unknowns. As we'll see throughout the doxology, God operates in a capacity that man cannot relate to and we only have insight to the wisdom and knowledge of God because He revealed it to us through His word.

Unsearchable His Judgements:

The second individual praise also found in verse 33 states:

"How unsearchable are His judgments."

In this instance, judgement isn't referring to God's wrath on sin, rather it's God's purposes and deliberative processes that are beyond human understanding. I view this as further bolstering his position on God giving mercy to some and not to others found in Romans 9:13-15.

"Just as it is written: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? Far from it! For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I have mercy, and I will show compassion to whomever I show compassion."

In praising God's wisdom and knowledge at the conclusion to this section of God's sovereignty, he's attributing the perfect clarity of God to give mercy to who He gives mercy to. Conversely, incomplete human insight or understanding shouldn't mischaracterize God and His purposes for the Jews and Gentiles because **we are subject to limited knowledge and wisdom.**

Unfathomable His Ways

The third individual praise is found at the end of verse 33 when Paul says: *"unfathomable His ways!"* The word used here translates as *anexichniastos* - which literally refers to footprints that are untrackable. Scripture is God's divine revelation of Himself and of His will and gives us enough so that we can have an understanding of His truth and all that's necessary for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness but even that isn't the full scope of God's ways as we see from David in Psalm 139:6:

"such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain it."
(Psalm 139:6)

No One Knows the Mind of the Lord

In the next two verses Paul asks 3 rhetorical questions about the sovereignty of God and before we take a deeper look into those I need you all to participate with me. Not that I'm old or anything but an old junior high teaching trick is to have them shout the same thing when it's their cue. Let's try this! Every time I begin a question with "For who" you wait for me to point to you and you shout "no one!" Sound good? Let's give this a try!

"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him, that it would be paid back to him?"

The next praise is found in the first half of verse 34: *"For who has known the mind of the Lord,"* We're **subject to limited insight** to God and to other people. Sometimes the hidden motives or depths of people make discussions to TV watching more entertaining but there is no mystery to God. He alone has perfect insight into people and Himself. This only addresses the things we know about God and not even including the many unrevealed things about God!

He Who Needs No Counsel

The next praise also in the form of a rhetorical question is found in verse 34:

"or who became His counselor?"

We are **subject to dependence**. Humans are 100% dependent on God. The entire human body is just one big vessel of dependence. Need a heart to keep pumping blood. Need blood to be circulating through the brain. Need the brain for the central nervous system. Need the Central Nervous System to think, move and breathe, etc. One depends on the other. We have no control over everything functioning properly.

To take this a step even further, our food comes from farmers. Farmers rely on nature and many elements out of their control for their crops to produce. We rely on the police to keep the public safety. In order to keep the public safe they need to remain safe. They need to see things to prevent crimes and keep the public safety. There are so many things out of our control that it makes all aspects of life impossible to control. All of these things however are within the sovereignty of God. We cannot be self-sufficient whereas God is entirely self-sufficient. This includes needing other people to help us in the way we should go. There's the common iron-sharpens-iron passage that'll be used for growing another individual. In order for that analogy to work it requires one to be dull or less refined. God isn't dull or less refined. There is no one who can offer something to God that He doesn't already know. He

doesn't need the refinement of another person as there is no one working at or above his capacity.

He Who's in Debt to No One

The last rhetorical question in Verse 35 says:

"Or who has first given to Him, that it would be paid back to him?"

Man is **subject to limited resources**. God has no such restrictions. No one was before God and none can give to God what has not been first received from Him.

*"Who has been first to give to Me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the entire heaven is Mine." Job 41:11*

I don't know if you've noticed it but with every praise, Paul has broadened the scope of supreme or ultimate power. By magnifying the qualities of God's sovereignty he's also revealing to the reader the things we are subject to and that God is subject to nothing. A quality of sovereignty or of supreme power is the lack of being made subject to anything. To some of you that may not come as shock but these passages highlight the human limitations and God's limitless nature.

In his book *The Knowledge of the Holy* A.W. Tozier says:

"How complexity satisfying to turn from our limitations to a God who has none. Eternal years lie in His heart. For him time does not pass, it remains; and those who are in Christ share with Him all the riches of limitless time and endless years. God never hurries. There are no deadlines against which He must work. Only to know this is to quiet our spirits and relax our nerves. For those out of Christ, time is a devouring beast; before the sons of the new creation time crouches and purrs and licks their hands. The foe of the old human race becomes the friend of the new, and the stars in their courses fight for the man God delights to honor. This we may learn from the divine infinitude."

He is the Source of All, the Means by Which All Things Exist, All of This Serves to Bring Him Glory

After writing about salvation in great length, Paul ends with an ascription of Glory to the Lord's sovereignty. His praising of God's sovereignty is 3 fold.

1. That **all things** find their place **from** God
2. **Nothing** can take place without God **appointing** it
3. He's the **goal** of all that exists and happens in creation

This isn't a new idea as it's littered throughout Scripture but I'll drop a couple of verses here before we conclude by looking at Romans 12:1.

Genesis 50:20 -

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to keep many people alive."

These words were spoken by Joseph after his brothers sold him to slavers and left him for dead. The point being that God can use evil situations to bring life, physical or spiritual; to others. His sovereign nature allows Him to orchestrate all things for His glory.

R.C. Sproul says *"If ever a person had room to complain of injustice it was Jesus. He was the only innocent man to ever be punished by God. If we stagger at the wrath of God, let us stagger at the cross. Here is where our astonishment should be focused. If we have cause for moral outrage, let it be directed at Golgotha."*

Romans 8:28 -

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Revisiting the second praise, “unsearchable His judgements” we see that God’s purposes go beyond human comprehension. His purposes even include using all things to work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purposes. All things would include the bad.

Finally,

John 9:1-3 -

“As Jesus passed by, He saw a man who had been blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?” Jesus answered, “It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.”

Finally, God can use our pains, afflictions and hurts to make the greater glory known. How much gospel impact has been made from those who testify to the work of Jesus despite their affliction? In the instance of the blind man, the works of God resulted in his healing but that isn’t always the case. How comforting then to the Christian, that no amount of suffering is wasted or purposeless. God can use your pain, affliction and hurt to point to His greater glory and bring life to others.

Conclusion

To this point, we’ve shed understanding on the sovereignty of God over salvation, elaborated on how this doxology broadens the characteristic of God’s sovereignty but this all begs the question... What are we then to do with all of this? How does this practically apply?

For that, we’re going to look at what Paul says next in Romans 12:1-2. To begin the next section on Christian living Paul writes:

“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Therefore - Picking up from the end of chapter 11, Paul then reasons: since all things are for His glory, the Christian responds by dedicating themselves to living for that purpose, God’s ultimate glory. Out of the mercies of God present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice. Unlike Old Testament sacrifices, what Christians are to offer is a dedication to the Lord that isn’t DOA but a continued offering that’s set apart for the Lord. Ourselves.

Continued devotion to being made new in Jesus is the offering acceptable to God. That by knowing and following Jesus we may be able to know what God’s will is by the renewal of our minds. That we’d receive a new way of thinking and new purpose, living for God’s glory; that runs counter to what the world would do.

1 Corinthians 10:31:

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all things for the glory of God.”

The sovereignty of God leads Christians to respond with praise and that expression of praise is living sold out for His glory. How can you live sold out for the glory of God in your home, work, neighborhood or school? What does it look like to devote all of yourself to God? Is something preventing you from living sold out in devotion to Him?

