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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: No One Like Our God

Transcribed Message
May 22, 2022
Romans 11:33

William Beebe was an explorer in the early 20th century. He was also a very good friend of President Theodore Roosevelt. On the many times that he would visit the White House, the story was told that they would each time go out onto the White House lawn once night had fallen and they would together look up into the starry heavens. They would have a little bit of a contest in which they were trying to see who could find the Andromeda galaxy first. Then when the person who found it declared where it was and he had pointed it out, one of them would say this: That is the spiral galaxy of Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a 100 million galaxies. It is 750,000 light years away. It consists of 100 billion suns each larger than our sun. After they had heard that recitation, they would think about it for a moment and then President Roosevelt supposedly would say through that toothy grin of his: I think we're small enough now. Let's go in.

And no doubt our understanding of the heavens is much greater today than it was even then. A.W. Tozer, over 50 years ago in his book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, said this: "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. History will show that no people has ever risen above its religion, no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. For this reason, the most important question before the church and us as individuals is what do I think about God."

I'm pretty sure that the apostle Paul would agree with all of that, but we actually don't have to wonder about that. We can hear from him that he does in fact agree as we turn to Romans chapter 11 this morning and this 33rd verse at the end of this great chapter. Our thought this morning is simply this: Our main pursuit in life is to know God. I know the answer to the great confession is that we would glorify God and enjoy Him forever, but the only way you can glorify God and enjoy Him forever is if you know God. They understood that you had to know God first. To know God is the greatest pursuit

that we can have in life. Nothing else is going to fulfill or satisfy. To know God is our greatest joy and delight.

To set the context of these closing verses of Romans, I want us to do a review that is a little bit more extensive than sometimes we do in previous Sundays because this is really the wrap-up verses of this chapter as we'll see this Sunday and Lord willing next. But remember, over the past many months we have been looking at these eight glorious chapters that began the book of Romans. I think you could argue these are some of the greatest chapters in the Bible. As far as a group collectively together you'd be hard-pressed to find a greater chapters. They're certainly the most doctrinally robust chapters in all of Paul's writings. They are lofty. They're beautiful. They're touching so many of the great doctrines of our faith. That is why this book is called the magnum opus, the greatest of all of Paul's works. As we go back to that opening set of verses in Romans, he begins with that very brief introduction of himself. Then he launches in to the gospel and salvation. In verse 16 he says for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith. As it is written the just shall live by faith." That's the launching point for the whole epistle, the gospel, this great and glorious salvation that God has revealed to us and made known to us.

And no sooner does he finish verse 17, then he moves into that sobering, powerful, sad description of human depravity beginning in 1:18 all the way to 3:20. Paul takes us literally to the depths figuratively of the lost condition of our world, this sin-filled world. But thanks be to God we come to verse 21 of the 3rd chapter and we have those two beautiful words "but now". Then Paul launches in to this remedy for man's sin. He begins to unfold and unpack for us the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ our Lord and this amazing doctrine of justification by faith that he launches at the beginning of chapter 5 and concludes in that 21st verse reminding us of what it is that Christ as our redeemer and Savior has done for us. Then he takes us into chapter 6, 7, 8 and into the doctrine of sanctification – how it is that God is setting us apart, how it is that He is sanctifying us and moving us into a greater sense of Christlikeness. He comes to the 8th chapter and it begins with no condemnation and it ends with no separation. We have

this beautiful picture of not only our sanctification but ultimately our glorification and security that we have in Christ. All of that in those opening eight chapters.

If that were not enough, then we come to three of the most compelling chapters in the Bible in chapters 9, 10 and 11. They're compelling in so many ways but one of the ways that they're compelling is because Paul begins to unfold for us these mysteries, things that before had not been known and would not be known if God had not seen fit to reveal them to us. One of those mysteries of course that we spent a lot of time on was the mystery of Jewish unbelief. How it is that God in this temporal judgment of His own people has blinded the minds of the Jewish people so that they do not understand, they do not comprehend, they do not embrace the gospel. That, Paul says, is a part of God's discipline of His own people who have rejected Him and rejected their Savior and rejected the gospel. But the mystery of that was that it allowed then for the Gentiles to hear and to embrace this gospel and to be literally grafted into the tree of belief. The marvel of God's grace continues. Then behold the mystery of Gentile belief stirring within the hearts of God's own people the Jewish people a renewed interest in the gospel that will lead I believe to the greatest spiritual awakening and revival in the history of humanity at the end of the age in which Jews will respond again back to the gospel.

After all of that, after eight amazing chapters and three more compelling chapters, all Paul could do when he comes to the end of that section, all he can do is simply rejoice in God's plan. I don't think there could be any more fitting four verses when you come to the end of Romans 1:1 all the way through 11:32 and the four verses that are before us at the end of this chapter. Now we know that this is the case because all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It is the Holy Spirit who compels Paul to write these words. We're not surprised when we come to them and we realize that here in fact is a God-centered theology.

This is the need of the hour, my friend. We are producing more narcissists than we can count. We are producing people even in the church whose first concern and first question is about themselves. God rightly brings us in these verses to understand that it is ultimately and finally and purposefully to be about Him. God presents to us in these chapters that very thing. We're going to look at verse 33 this morning and then, Lord

willing, next Sunday verses 34 through 36. We're going to end next Sunday morning with communion and we're going to pass the communion trays and actually have edible crackers to eat for the first time in years since Covid began. Yes, praise the Lord. Amen. We look forward to that. My hope this morning is simply that even as we began this morning in worshiping our God in song and then we come to the Word and we're drawn again to worship our great God and Savior, and then we'll end this morning singing to Him and I look forward to doing it all over again next Sunday and finishing next Sunday with communion.

But a very quick overview of these verses 33 to 36. What you have here in these verses is not just the climax. It is not just a benediction. It is not just the doxology. It is really a great transition and we know it's a great transition because when we get to chapter 12, which we will by the way later in the fall. Remember, we're going to take a break this summer and we're going to step away from Romans. We're going to do a series this summer dealing with marriage. But we'll come back to chapter 12 this fall.

The very first thing that we'll see when we come to chapter 12 is "therefore". You don't begin a conversation with "therefore" unless you fully intend to go back to something that was previously said. This is a set of verses that is a benediction and a doxology. But don't miss the fact that it is a great transition. What Paul is going to do in this transition is he's going to prepare us in effect for what is to come. What is to come is borne out of our worship in these closing verses. There are going to be three sets of three. There's going to be three declarations that we'll look at this morning. The declaration about the riches of God, the wisdom of God, the knowledge of God. There are going to be three questions that he's going to confront us with: Who has known the mind of God? Who has been His counselor? Who has given God's gifts? And then he's going to end with three reasons to praise: All things are from Him and through Him and to Him, and this is where God wants us to be in response to chapters 1 through 11. He wants us to come to the end of this set of chapters and just be amazed and just be in awe and just be worshiping Him because we will never be able to step in to chapters 12 and all the way to 16. When we get into those chapters it is just one practical reality of how to live the Christian life after another. That's what Paul's doing. He's setting the table in those first 11 chapters of doctrine. He gives us this transition in preparation for

how do you live this out now. That's what's going to happen. But you can't live it out, he is saying, if you don't have a God-centered theology about life. You miss it, and you won't be able to see the beauty of the application of the gospel the way Paul intends.

Let's look at the starting point of all is in fact the knowledge of God. The starting point of all is the knowledge of God. I ask you a question: Can we know God? Are you sure? You get half credit. No, you are right. When we ask the question can we know God, there really isn't a wrong answer to being able to say yes, we can or no, we can't. there is a sense when we ask the question can we know God that we rightly have to say no, we can't, because after all God is infinite. God is incomprehensible. God is so great, He is so beyond our capacity to understand. It's like the most primitive creature, the most primitive being trying to explain the most glorious. Of course we fall short of that. In a sense for me, if we ask the question can we know God, we have to put a little asterisk and say no, but then we follow up immediately and say yes, yes, we can.

We can of course because God has revealed Himself, but our knowledge of God is always imperfect. Our knowledge of God is always incomplete. That's true, not just of our time and our life here now. We all readily acknowledge that. But understand and grasp that it is always going to be that way, even in eternity. We're not going to be able to fully comprehend and grasp an infinite and eternal and incomprehensible God. We're going to spend all of eternity learning more, but we'll never get to the place where we fully comprehend this amazing God the Scriptures make known to us. My hope and prayer as the pastor of Covenant Community Church is that there will not be all of us gathered in remedial Theology 101 when we get there. We want to be so God-centered now that we can maybe go to Theology 201 when we get there. But irrespective, it doesn't matter which class we'll be in. We're going to be learning all of eternity about the wonders of God.

Then we ask the second question: Can God be defined? Can God be defined? Again, we have to answer it in both ways. No, God can't be defined as to His essential nature. We just can't grasp or comprehend the essential nature of God. Again, we answer that question with a yes, if we mean can we describe God. Can we step into what the Scriptures say about the attributes of God and the virtues of God and the perfections of God and the excellencies of God? After all, that's what Peter says in 1

Peter chapter 2 verse 9: “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” When we think of how it is that we would define or describe God we often think of that in terms of His attributes, don't we?

We put his attributes in two different categories: incommunicable attributes and communicable attributes. This isn't a comprehensive list but when we think of His incommunicable attributes, these are things that God does not share with us. We will never be infinite. We'll never be eternal. We're never going to be incomprehensible or omnipresent or omniscient. We're not ever going to be any of those things listed under the incommunicable attributes of God. Those are unique to Him alone. That's why we always have to be reminded that even in heaven we're still creatures. We never become a little god in heaven. We'll always be just little people, humans forever.

But then there are attributes of God called communicable attributes that God shares with us. He doesn't just share them us. He commands them of us. Be holy as I am holy. The just, the righteous shall live by faith. You go through that list and you realize God is requiring, He's compelling, He's commanding me to literally take on and share in some of His divine attributes, to be people who know what it is to be gracious and merciful and kind and generous and patient.

Now with all of that, Paul comes to verse 33. “O, the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments. How inscrutable His ways.” This is just the wonder of God. This is Paul just sitting back and as the Spirit of God has poured out these 11 chapters of amazing truth, Paul probably just at some point put down the pen, put down the thought process and just reflected on all that God had revealed to him. Rightly, as I said before, this is often referred to as a benediction or more familiarly a doxology. When we think of doxology some of you maybe grew up in a tradition where every Sunday you sang the doxology. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above, ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. That's a doxology. That is what Paul's doing here as he brings these chapters to a close.

Don't hurry past the fact that he begins with this sense of awe. Those first three words. O, the depth. O, he starts off. That is just an emotional response as Paul is

reflecting in a very heartfelt way as he is contemplating the sovereign gracious work of God in saving and sanctifying sinners. He's overwhelmed by the magnitude of God's grace as he brought to us the depths of human depravity and sinfulness that led to the putting to death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul begins O, the depths, the deep things, the hidden things, the unreachable things. Daniel, in his prayer in the second chapter of Daniel, blessed the God of heaven. Verse 20. "And he answered and said, 'Blessed be the name of God forever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times in season. He removes kings and he sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things. He knows what is in the darkness and the light dwells with Him.'"

When you hear that phrase "O, the depth" there are some deep places in our world, our physical world that I personally do not want to go. I do not want to get into one of those little tiny submersible submarines and go to the depths. I just don't want to do that. I have no desire to go down there and be surprised by something that nobody knew was down there. Take me to a mountain especially to a mountain in Oklahoma and I can climb that mountain. He is saying here O, the depths, as if there is a hiddenness. There's a deepness. There's so much that is unknown. That's what he's speaking of when he talks about our God.

Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 9. Familiar words. "But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him.' These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." Who has known the mind of God? Who has known the deep things of God? The Spirit has, because the Spirit is the Spirit of God.

Paul speaks of this depth into which the greatness of God takes us. There are three words then that he attaches to this idea of the depth of God. The first one is God is rich beyond comprehension. There is the depth to the riches of God that is beyond comprehension. How would you answer the question in what sense is God rich? In what sense is God rich? O, the depth of the riches of God. How would you describe God as being rich? Let me give you three possibilities.

The first one is everything is His. Everything is His. Psalm 24. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and all those who dwell therein. So you could respond first off and simply say that God is rich because it's all His. Go get your Warren Buffett and your Bill Gates and your Elon Musk. Put all that they own, all the billions that these richest men in the world own and put it all out there. God says they're paupers. They're paupers. That's why He says seek first the kingdom of God. That's why He says set your affection on things above and not on things on the earth. What do you think those men are going to have at the end of their life if they don't have Christ? They will have nothing. And yet how many in this room would have to say that is where my heart is being pulled – towards the things of the world, towards the stuff of the world. Just look at the priorities of your life and answer the question. God is rich in the sense that everything is His.

He is rich in the sense that He is the maker of everything. He's the maker of it all. In the beginning God created. And by the way, He created out of nothing. Someone rightly said if He wants to make more stuff there's a lot of nothing out there. There's still a lot of nothing. If He wants to make more, He will.

Then thirdly, He Himself is the greatest treasure. This is what we should see. He owns it all. He made it all. But He really would want us to see when we talk about plumbing the depths of the riches of God, what He would really want us to see is that in fact He is the riches. He is the greatest treasure. Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 7. "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses according to the riches of His grace." Go over a page to chapter 3 and verse 8 and there Paul says: "To me though, I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ." Ultimately God is rich in that He is our greatest treasure. It's not just that He owns or creates or gives, it is that He Himself is our treasure. That's why we can rightly answer the question what is the chief end of man. It is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever because of who He is, unfathomable in His riches.

Then secondly, God is rich in that He is wise beyond comprehension. Here I think the wisdom of God in this context is in light of how it is that God arranges and orders all things to accomplish His purposes, especially in relation to the gospel,

especially in relation to salvation. That's the theme of Romans, the gospel that Paul isn't ashamed of, the gospel that is revealed in Jesus Christ. We've already talked about this amazing mystery of Jewish hardening of their hearts so that they are in unbelief and how that impacts the Gentile nations to where they are drawn to the gospel, which in turn causes Israel to be jealous of the Gentiles and come back in faith to Christ as the Spirit of God reawakens them to that reality. That is true. That is the wisdom of God on display. Who would've ever thought of that? But I think there is so much more here. In the broader plan of salvation that no doubt Paul has in mind when he talks about the riches of the wisdom of God.

He would no doubt take us back into eternity past and into the great Council of the Godhead so that somewhere back in eternity past the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in that divine counsel determined a plan to save a fallen humanity. It was decided in that counsel by the wisdom of God that the second person of the Godhead, Jesus, would come to this earth, would be conceived of a virgin, would be born linking together perfect deity with perfect humanity in the hypostatic union that nobody can explain. That is the wisdom of God. He would live out a perfect life, a sinless life in a sin-sick world. He would navigate every day all what that looked like. He would be compelled by His own inner willingness to go to the cross, to die that horrible death, to make a propitiation for us satisfying the wrath of the Father against sin, bringing about our reconciliation, accomplishing redemption for us, that leads to our justification. My friends, this is the wisdom of God.

The heart of man can't think of any of this. This is what Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians when he says in the 2nd chapter and in verse 7: "But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this for if they had they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." Then you go back to the second verse of that same chapter: "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." The wisdom of God. Go back to the 1st chapter and verse 18 where Paul says "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Then verse 21: "For since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through folly of what we preach to save those who

believe.” Verse 23. “But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles.”

I simply say to you – apart from the revealed wisdom of God, we would never know what our problem is. Look at our world. They have no idea what their problem is. They're coming up with all kinds of creative ways to explain what the problem is but they don't have the wisdom of God. They will never understand that it is sin that has separated us from God. They redefine all of our problems to where they are manageable by humanity. What do we do in our human wisdom when we do encounter something that's not the way it should be? We devise a religion. We devise a man-made approach whereby we go through all kinds of rituals and works and sacraments. Look at the religions of the world. What is that? That is the foolishness of human thinking in comparison to the wisdom of God that says this is your problem and this is the solution. That's what Paul is speaking of here. O, the depths of the riches of the wisdom of God.

Then look at the last one. God is knowledgeable beyond comprehension. He is knowledgeable beyond comprehension. O, the depth of the of the riches of the wisdom and now of the knowledge of God. Beyond comprehension. Has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God? Nothing has ever occurred to God. He knows everything. He's never learned anything. He cannot learn. He simply knows the depth of the knowledge of God. He knows everything that there is to know about the past. He knows everything that there is to know about the present. He knows everything that there is to know about the future. He knows about every possibility. He knows about every outcome. He knows everything that there is to know. He knows everything that has happened and ever will happen.

There is unfortunately in some evangelical circles today those who deny this truth. They've come up with a new theology that is called “openness theology”. If you're ever reading a guy named Dr. Greg Boyd, let your ears be perked up because Dr. Boyd is a proponent of openness theology. He says this in his book *Letters from a Skeptic*: “God faces the future with a certain degree of openness. The future is not entirely a settled matter so God can't know what is about to happen any more than you and I could know what is about to happen.” This idea comes out of a speculation about how is it that we deal with this matter of our relationship to God and human free will and human

choice. I would say to you that this is a terrible solution. This is in fact a preposterous theological position to take in light of Scripture. Read Psalm 139. Read Romans. Read Scripture and see what God says about Himself. His knowledge is complete.

Then look at the last of verse 33. "O, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways." It is almost like Paul comes to the end of this verse and goes oh, wait a minute. There's one more thing I need to add to this matter of the depth of God, and that is He is unsearchable in His judgments. He is unsearchable in His judgments. The word "unsearchable" simply means that it can't be discovered, it can't be searched out. It takes me to Deuteronomy 29:29. The secret things belong to the Lord our God and if He doesn't reveal them, then they're secrets. That's what he's saying here. There are things about the judgments of God that are unsearchable. The judgments isn't, I don't think, just the idea of a final judgment or of God's discipline in that sense of judgment. I think it's broader. I think it's the decrees of God. I think it's the decisions of God. I think it's the workings of God. I think when we get next week, Lord willing, into verses 34 and 35, we'll see that.

But then he says, "and He is inscrutable in His ways". He is inscrutable in His ways. The word "inscrutable" by the way for those of you guys that like to hunt, it is a word that speaks of a hunter on the trail tracking something and then the trail just disappears. The track is gone. It can no longer be found. A very graphic word picture here. God is inscrutable. He's untrackable. He can't be traced in His ways which takes us to Isaiah 55:8, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are My ways your ways, says the Lord." Job, you remember, asked God, God, please explain Yourself to me. Please explain Yourself to me in light of what's going on in my life. And God rather clearly said back to Job, if I told you, you would not understand. It reminds us that part of the life of faith is trusting in this God who is rich in so many ways. His wisdom is knowledge. Our main pursuit in life is to know God. Nothing else will satisfy or fulfill. To know God is our greatest joy and delight.

What do we take away? I think we take away what I can't help but imagine Paul is putting before us in so many words, and that is simply that theology and worship are partners together. Theology and worship just go together. Rich theology leads to a deep

and heartfelt worship. I wish I had saved it or made a note about where it was, but I read somewhere last week a neat little illustration that I'm just going to try to pull up from memory. The idea is very much a part of what Paul's pressing into here. It is kind of a parable or a story of a group of philosophers who in their mighty emphasis and attempts to understand the real challenges of life. Very sure, very confident in themselves. The picture is that this group of philosophers is scaling this mountain. This mountain of human struggles and human challenges and all of the things that make up life. There's a group of people who love to philosophize about all those things and as they finally reach the top of the mountain, they pull themselves up over the last of the peak and there sits a group of theologians having a discussion among themselves. That's what Paul wants us to see here. It is truly that when you and I step into a theology that puts God in the center of it all that we are able to understand what life is really to be about.

My friend, you were made to be in a relationship with God. There is within every one of us a God-sized, God-shaped vacuum that can only be filled in a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. That longing in your heart for something that you may be attempting to fill with any number of things that may temporarily satisfy from time to time, but in the end, you were made by God to be in a relationship with Him. Through the wisdom of God, He sent His Son because God so loved the world, God so loves you that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Oh, how we would want you this morning to know with absolute certainty just as we came to the end of that 8th chapter of the book of Romans that we know for sure that we are going to spend eternity with God forever in heaven. That is in fact what God wants you to know as well. You can if you will believe that Jesus died for your sins and simply by trusting in Him He will give you the gift of eternal life.

Let's pray. Father God, Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit, how we thank You for this benediction, this doxology of praise that You have brought before us by Your Spirit this morning in Your Word. Lord, we can't help but rejoice. We can't help but give thanks. We can't help but worship You for all that You have done for us. We ask again, Father, that if there is anyone listening, watching here this morning that does not know Jesus as their personal Savior, has not experienced the forgiveness of sin, that You would by

Your Spirit open their eyes to understand the gospel comes to us and it is simply by faith and trust in believing that what Jesus did He did for each one of us. We pray to that end. In Christ's name, amen.