

The Mystery of Salvation - Part Two

Scripture Text: Romans 11:33-36

Introduction and Summary

We have covered a lot of ground in Paul's letter to the Romans. We have learned about our sinful nature. Paul has told us that sin leads to death. Every one of us earns death through our sinful nature. God's Word reveals what God requires of each of us, yet, none of us can follow His commandments perfectly. If we try to pursue righteousness by following His Law, by good works, we will only end in failure. This leaves us in a terrible predicament. God tells us what we are supposed to do, but we are incapable of doing it. Not following the Law, however, leads to eternal separation from God. That is when Paul revealed to us God's plan of salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ. By trusting in Jesus and His righteous sacrifice on the cross of Calvary, we can be forgiven of sin and declared right by God. Not only that, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Once we are adopted into God's family, forever will we remain. We may have many troubles in this world, but we have an everlasting and glorious future.

Then in chapters nine through eleven, Paul shifted his attention to his fellow brethren, the Jewish people. Paul expressed deep sorrow that so many of his fellow Israelites had not embraced the gospel — the good news of Jesus Christ, which is the power of God for salvation, to everyone who believes (Romans 1:16). In these chapters, Paul wrestled with the fact that so many of the Israelites had rejected Jesus Christ and were destined for destruction. He dealt with questions about whether all of God's promises to Israel will be fulfilled. He asked whether they could trust God to keep His Word — to keep His promises. He questioned whether God was just. He dealt with the issue of how God, for a time at least, could somehow turn His back on the Jewish people and instead focus on the non-Jewish people, the Gentiles. These were the issues Paul had been wrestling with in those chapters. Through all these issues, Paul asserted that God is faithful, He is just, and He is merciful.

Last week, we read about the *mystery* of Israel's salvation. We discovered that God has worked through Israel's disobedience and the Gentiles' faithfulness to eventually save all of Israel. It is a mystery as to how God's plan will work to save all of Israel and show mercy to all — both Israel and the Gentiles. Now we come to the end of chapter eleven and maybe some wonder what is the point of all of this theology? What is the reason for Paul leading us down this trek of God's work in the lives of both Jews and non-Jewish people? The passage today marks the end of one section in the letter. Next time, we will start with chapter twelve and begin looking at some very practical statements regarding how we should demonstrate our Christian faith in everyday life. But for today, we look at what was the point of all of those weighty issues and all of those challenging and sometimes confusing statements Paul made us endure until now. How shall we respond to all of this? Paul's answer is simple — *worship our awesome God!* In the final few verses of chapter eleven, we find a beautiful hymn of praise to our God.

From Theology to Doxology

The concluding passage in chapter eleven is oftentimes referred to as a *doxology*. A doxology is a short hymn or statement that praises God. There are many types of doxologies. For instance, the Roman Catholic Church commonly recites the following:

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.

Another doxology that most Protestant denominations commonly recite is the following:

*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. Amen.*

In similar fashion, there are several doxologies throughout Scripture, each one praising God for being God. It is fitting that Paul ends this section of the letter with a hymn of praise to God. After Paul concludes writing about Israel's current unbelief and how God has worked through the lives of both the Jewish and Gentile people, he is moved to praise God's wisdom, power, and plan through a short hymn.

Recognize God as Incomprehensible

We have probably all heard about the "Romans Road to Salvation". We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). The result of sin is death and eternal separation from God (Romans 6:23). The good news is that God demonstrated His love for us by sending His one and only Son to die for us, even though we were His enemies (Romans 5:8). Anyone who calls upon Jesus Christ, confessing Him as Lord and believing God raised Him from the dead, will be saved from eternal death (Romans 10:9, 13). Reading through Romans, it became apparent to me that Paul's letter is also about a *road to riches*. Salvation means riches for us. We were slaves who became royalty through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Of course, the real riches belong to God. He is the One who owns a cattle on a thousand hills (Psalm 50:10). He is the One who owns everything. In this passage, Paul spoke of God's riches in terms of Who He is.

Romans 11:33 ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

There are a couple of things to point out here. One, Paul referred to the "depth" of God's riches and wisdom and knowledge. What God has, what God knows, and what God does with what He knows are deeper than we can imagine. They are so far from our reach. God's judgements are unsearchable and His ways are unexplainable. Basically, *God is incomprehensible*. He is so far beyond us! God's decisions and God's plans are often impossible for us to fully understand. One thing is God's dealing with Israel and the Gentiles. Who could have foreseen what God was working out? God is not like

something we can observe in a microscope or a telescope or through careful observation. This does not mean that we cannot know anything about God, but it does mean that what ever we know about Him is what He has chosen to reveal to us. This verse reminds me of something the prophet Isaiah revealed about God.

Isaiah 55:8–9 ⁸ *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.* ⁹ *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

God's thoughts and ways are much higher than ours. God saved the Gentiles when one would expect only the Jews to be saved. In the future, He will amaze all by His grace again by saving the Jews, so that it will be clear that everyone's salvation is by mercy alone. Just as God dealings with Israel are a mystery, so is the salvation of all of His people, the Church, a mystery. God chooses to have mercy on whomever He wills. God elects people to salvation. It is God's work that saves us, not ours. Yet, people must believe and confess Jesus Christ. People must call on Christ in order to be saved. Christians also must tell others about Christ, otherwise, how are people going to believe in Jesus who they have never heard (Romans 10:14). And through all of this, God has mercy on *all* and extends His loving hands *all day long* to a disobedient and contrary people (Romans 10:21). The way God reaches out to the world and saves us is beyond our comprehension. This is the mystery of our salvation.

Humble Ourselves Before God

How often have you believed you knew God well. How many times have you said that this is who God is or this is how He should do things. How many times have you believed that you knew better than God did about something that was going on in your life? I am sure we have all done that from time to time. When we go through situations in life, it is common for us to "know" what needs to be done or what God needs to do to make the situation "right". The truth is that we oftentimes do not know these things. The next two verses in this passage indicate how we really ought to think about ourselves before God. To do this, Paul quoted two Old Testament sources, Isaiah and Job.

Romans 11:34-35 ³⁴ *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"* ³⁵ *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"*

How can anyone say they know the mind of God or understand perfectly how He relates to us? Who are we to question God? Who among us can tell God what to do or what He needs to do? None of us can, and yet, we make the mistake that we have God all figured out or that we know exactly what He needs to do or has done. The prophet Isaiah taught that no human being knows the mind of the Lord (Isaiah 40:13). Whatever we know about God is because God has revealed it to us. Isaiah also wrote that no one can serve as God's adviser. Who among us can advise God on His plans? Can you imagine the Creator of the universe would ever need instruction or counsel from those He created? What could we ever suggest to God that He did not already know? He has known all things forever. No person can legitimately ask God, "What are you doing?"

Paul also quoted Job to remind us that no one ultimately gives anything to God (Job 41:11). God does not, and never will, owe anyone anything. He is not indebted to anyone. In fact, God does not need anything. Instead, everything we have is a gift from God. Our lives are a gift from God. Our possessions, which are not really ours, are a gift from God. Our relationship with Him is even a gift. Salvation and eternal life is a gift from God. Everything we have comes from Him. The only thing we can give Him, the one thing He desires, is ourselves in complete devotion and love to Him. God does not want or need your money, your stuff, or your attendance. He wants you! The appropriate response to coming into the presence of God is always to give yourself to Him.

Respond by Worshipping God

This leads us to the last verse. The appropriate response to recognizing God as incomprehensible and humbling ourselves before Him, is to worship Him. God's wisdom and ways are far beyond the understanding of human beings, and hence He deserves all the glory. And thus, we reach the climax of Paul's doxology in this chapter.

Romans 11:36 ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

This final verse makes three profound statements about God. One, all things come from Him. There was a time when there was nothing but God, then He created. God is the Creator of everything. Two, God sustains all that there is. Not only is He the source of all that exists, through His divine providence, all things are sustained. Three, all that exists is *for Him*. God created everything for His pleasure. His own glory is His highest aim. Since all things are from God, and through God, and for God, it follows that He deserves all the glory forever. We can take no credit for any of it, for God is the One who deserves all glory. Put another way, God is to be honored because He is the Alpha and the Omega—the Creator, the sustainer and ruler, and the goal of all things.

The mystery of God's saving plan for human beings brings Him great honor, praise, and glory forever and ever. God's glory also applies to how we use our gifts and how we live as Christians. The Apostle Peter wrote the following concerning our gifts.

1 Peter 4:10–11 ¹⁰ *As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: ¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

What we have comes from God and is for God. So, Paul began this section of his letter to the Romans in chapter nine from the very depth of his concern for the Israelites, willing to be cut off from Christ if it meant that they would be saved. Now, Paul reached the height of praise and adoration for God, affirming the mystery of God's plan of salvation and acknowledging that God alone is worthy of all praise and glory. To Him be glory and honor and power, forever (Revelation 4:11).

Conclusion

In closing, the end result of Romans chapters nine through eleven is not an academic discussion or a theological argument. It is worship! Our study of God and His ways among us should compel our hearts to praise Him. Too often we get bogged down in the minutia of detail, trying to work out every possible thing about God and our relationship with Him, trying to have a nicely packaged theology, that we forget the one simple reason for all of this — *give glory to God!* Is that you? Are you trying to figure God out that you are missing the greatest thing — God Himself. The last portion of this chapter, verses thirty-three to thirty-six explains the proper response of our hearts to God's work and the mystery of our salvation. It is worship. Recognize Who God is. Come humbly before Him. Use your time, talents and treasures for Him. Praise Him for all things. To God be the glory! Amen!