

A Doxology of Theology

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[0:00] Let's go.

In the opening verses of chapter 12. Not that the passage we're going to look at tonight is not familiar. It isn't familiar. This is a jewel of a passage in the Bible.

So let me read it to you. As a matter of fact, I'm going to read it to you from the English Standard Version. And the reason I'm doing that is because I, at least part of it, I really do like the way they have translated it.

All right? So here it is in the ESV. And some of you have an ESV, so you'll be able to read right along with me. Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are His judgments. And how inscrutable His ways. What an incredible passage of Scripture.

[1:47] And I really don't think, and this may sound a little strange, but I don't think this passage was meant to be preached necessarily.

This is a praise. It's a doxology. And so then it's difficult for a preacher to approach this text and to systematically, expositively preach this passage.

Because it really, in a sense, was meant to be sung. I'm not suggesting that Paul had a tune in mind when he wrote these words. I don't have any idea about that.

I don't think so. But it's not really something to be preached. It's a doxology. In fact, some have called this a doxology of theology.

Or, I think, better put, a theology now turned into doxology. And that's what we have. Dr. Robert Smith, and you may not have ever heard of him.

[3:02] He's a preaching professor at Beeson Divinity School, a school within Sanford University. And he wrote a book some years ago entitled *Doctrine That Dances*.

It's an unusual title, isn't it? *Doctrine That Dances*. And it really is a good book, not just for preachers, though it is a book written to preachers and about preaching, but an unusual title. And in his book, he declared this about preaching. He said that preaching is both cranial and cardiological. That is, it is about head and heart.

Just in case, you know, maybe I didn't say the words exactly right, so you were confused. Cranial and cardiological. It involves the head and the heart.

Fact and feeling. And that really is a good description of what preaching ought to be. It's not necessarily always that way. I work very hard to try to bring feeling and emotion into it as well as the facts, but it's kind of easy for most preachers to just camp out with the facts, you know, and try to be heady without any emotion.

[4:19] But really, preaching is both cranial and cardiological. Now, I use that as my introduction because I think that explains what Paul is doing here.

That explains the conclusion of this chapter. Because it's quite different from everything that Paul has said prior to. Not just different in substance, but different in its tone.

Dramatically different. You say, listen, for the better part of 11 chapters in Romans, Paul has been, for the most part, cranial. Very cranial.

Very fact. Very theological. And what is he doing in these? And has been doing in these 11 chapters. He's been hammering out for his readers the great doctrine of salvation.

And I would say, suggest to you, that chapters 9, 10, and 11 that form a unit, not some parentheses, but a unit that really go together.

[5:21] I think in chapters 9, 10, 11, we have been brought to the pinnacle of this doctrine. The doctrine of salvation. In fact, here in chapter 11, as we saw last week, or when was it?

I guess it was last week. Week before. Anyway, yeah, because I wasn't here last Sunday night. All right. A couple weeks ago, we looked at chapter 11.

And I am telling you that here in chapter 11, we are allowed not only to reach the pinnacle of this great doctrine of salvation, but we are allowed to peer over the top into the future.

Albeit, we're given just scant information, just a sketch of it. And really, Paul has, in all of these chapters, chapters 11, he has traced God's purpose in salvation.

His purposes in redemption. If I could just trace them out. From Gentile disobedience, that's how really things began, to Jewish acceptance when God chose a people for himself, next to Jewish disobedience when they rejected him and rejected his Messiah, and then after that, Gentile acceptance, and that's where we are right now in this, quote, dispensation.

[6:50] In the church age, the age of the Gentiles. That's where we are now. And then we're going to one day see Jewish acceptance, and all Israel will be saved, and then worldwide salvation.

Now, these last two are yet to come. They're future. And as a matter of fact, the beginning of it, the better part of it, is going to happen while we're not even here.

And so, Paul has kind of traced all this out for us. And he's laying it out for us. And then he kind of summarizes all of that in verses 28 to 32.

Look at it again. Concerning the gospel, they, that is the Jews, are enemies for your sake, you Gentiles' sake, but concerning election, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. For as you were once disobedient to God, speaking to the Gentiles, that through the mercy shown you, they also may obtain mercy.

[7:55] For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all. And then he says, Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

You see, he's summarizing all of this. And as I said a couple weeks ago, here's what he said in chapter 11. God rejected Israel when they rejected Him in order to save the Gentiles.

That's us. In order to save all Israel, His chosen remnant, one day He will. In order to save the world. Worldwide salvation. And so is it really any wonder that Paul at this point abruptly changes his tone and the substance of what he's writing?

He turns in his focus from theology to doxology. And Paul cries out with his pen, though I think he did personally as well, but with his pen, he cries out to us, Oh, the depth of the riches, of the wisdom, of the knowledge of God.

A great theologian of yesteryear put it this way, quote, When a man wades into the ocean, he feels safe as long as he can feel the sand beneath his feet.

[9:18] But let him proceed farther out and he will feel the sand disappearing. Eventually a wave comes and hurls him into the surf where he is tossed this way and that.

And as the current carries him outward, he cries out, Oh, the depth! And this is Paul. Mentally and spiritually, that is what has happened to Paul.

And so then Paul's doxology, again, I don't think it was really meant to be a theological lesson on the nature and character of God. I don't think it was necessarily meant to be preached.

But rather, I think Paul's desire is that we would all be caught up in his praise, in his worship, based upon all of these great truths that God has revealed to him and through him to us.

All right, so, that said, I think this doxology does teach us some things about the nature of God. It clearly teaches us some things about his character, about who God is.

[10:29] And I think we ought to say at this point, even before I give you kind of a three-point little outline of this doxology, that really all of this should be understood in the context of salvation.

of salvation. Though the truths that are given to us explicitly about God and even implied about God, though those truths are far-reaching beyond just simply the context or the doctrine of salvation, we do need to understand that this comes at the close of a long discourse on the doctrine of salvation.

And so, we need to understand it in that context. And I'll remind you kind of about that along the way. But here are three things that are very simple that we can learn from this doxology.

First, the mystery of God. The mystery of God. Second, the mastery of God.

Absolute mastery of God in all things. And third, and finally, the majesty of God. Pretty simple outline. The mystery of God, the mastery of God, the majesty of God.

[11:49] First, the mystery of God. That's pretty clear. This is what Paul is saying. The great mystery of God. And three points of mystery Paul mentions here.

Oh, the depth of the riches. That's the first one. Of wisdom. And third, of knowledge. The knowledge of God. And all three describe for us the nature of God in relation to salvation. And really, in relation to His whole nature and character. His riches, His wisdom, His knowledge. It's not the riches both of wisdom and of knowledge. Though the King James seems to suggest that. But I'll give you a little technical information about the grammar here. There are three nouns here. Riches, wisdom, and knowledge. And there are all three what are called genitive nouns. [12 : 50] And the idea of the genitive is possession. Possessiveness. And so really, I could literally translate it this way.

Oh, the depth of the riches and of the wisdom and of the knowledge of or possessed by God. Those three things.

So Paul is considering three things that belong to the nature and character of God. His riches, first of all. His riches, His great wealth.

That is the depth of His riches in salvation. Remember, that's the context. The riches of His mercy and His grace.

In fact, a verse or two before, he talks about all being captive in disobedience so that He might show mercy to all. That's a mystery.

[13 : 48] That He would hold captive those in disobedience so that, in order that, at some point, He would reveal His great mercy toward all. It's incredible.

It's mysterious. The context is salvation. So these riches are the depth of His saving resources. The depth of His wealth and glory in salvation.

And then His wisdom. That's the second thing. And that is specifically, I think, in the context of the chapter, the context of salvation, Paul's referring to God's magnificent program of redemption that goes out beyond even what we could comprehend.

And we think that we can somehow figure all of this out. And as a matter of fact, when we can't figure it all out, we react negatively usually to God's doctrine, His plan of redemption and salvation. We can't figure it out, but it's deep. The deep purposes of God in redemption. His wisdom, you see, encompasses all of His purpose of salvation.

[15 : 02] A purpose to carry out His divine program for His glory. That's His wisdom. We could spend a lot of time trying to somehow explain that and describe that, but that's really what it is.

His purposes. The deep purposes of God in salvation that, by the way, go beyond even this life. Out into eternity. And that part we have not a clue about. About His purposes in salvation. His knowledge, what is this?

Well, again, in the context of Paul's subject, which again is redemption, salvation, Paul's referring to God's, the means, the means through which God will carry out His divine program.

That's His knowledge, the means through which He will carry all of this out. And so you see, God's wisdom is His saving purpose and it's a wise purpose. And His knowledge is the means whereby He works that saving purpose out.

[16 : 18] God knows how to bring about His divine plan, how to get that done. He knows how to get that done. We don't see it. We can't even hardly look back in our own life, in our own spiritual journey, and see how it was all done.

And God knows how to get it done, though. He knows all ends. He knows the end from the beginning, the Bible says. And I believe that means He knows all scenarios, all avenues, all ends, and He knows how to bring all of that together to fulfill His purpose.

That's His knowledge. Oh, the depth of the riches and of the wisdom and of the knowledge possessed by God.

And what does Paul say next? He says, how unsearchable are His judgments. How unsearchable are all these things. And how inscrutable.

Now, that's not a word we use every day, is it? Some translations might have unfathomable. I have a hard time even saying the word.

[17 : 33] Or maybe, I think, maybe in some translations you might even have untraceable. And that really is the meaning of the word. It's untraceable. God's purposes and the means by which He brings about those purposes are untraceable.

They're untraceable. That is, He doesn't leave any footprints. Deuteronomy 29 and verse 29 says, the secret things belong to the Lord our God.

But those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever. What are those things? Well, they're right here in this book. This isn't all of it in regard to God and His purposes and His plans.

The secret things belong to Him. Great is the mystery of godliness, the Bible says. These things belong to us and to our children forever that we may, the Bible says, do all the words of His law so that we know how to obey Him and how to serve Him and how to worship Him.

These things belong to us so that we can please Him and honor Him with our lives. but the secret things of God. Specifically, His purposes in salvation are, they belong to Him.

[18:53] Isaiah 55, 9, a familiar passage, for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

I love what God said to Job in Job 38 and verse 4. Listen to that. He said to Job, where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?

Has He ever said something like that to you? We think we're so smart and we think somehow we can advise God on things like things we need and what we think God ought to do and God says, where were you when I created everything?

And He goes on, tell me if you have understanding who determined its measurements? Surely you know, almost sarcastically asked.

Or who stretched the line upon it? The creation. To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone? When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God, that's the angels, shouted for joy.

[20:01] Or who shut in the sea with doors when it burst forth and issued from the womb? When I made the clouds its garment and the thick darkness its swaddling hand?

When I fixed my limit for it, the seas and the clouds, and set bars and doors, when I said, this far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop.

And on and on He goes all the way through that chapter and on into the next chapter. Putting us in our place. Where were you when I made, laid the foundations for all things, created all things?

See, the depth of the riches and of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God. John Wesley once said, show me a worm that can fully comprehend a man and I'll show you a man who can comprehend God.

Huh. Well, go ahead. Show him one. Show me one. He's incomprehensible. He's unfathomable. He's untraceable.

[21:07] His steps are. He does not leave footprints, the Bible says. I read a story about St. Augustine, distinguished Bishop of Hippo. You know, you've heard of Augustine and it seems he was walking on the beach one day by the Mediterranean Sea and Augustine was trying to figure out the Trinity.

He was contemplating it, trying to comprehend the doctrine of the Trinity. What a subject to try to comprehend. And so there he is walking and going over this in his mind and trying to get a hold on it but he's interrupted by a little boy and he just suddenly observes there's this little boy and he has a bucket in his hand and he watches as he goes down to the beach to the water and gathers up a big bucket full of water sea water and he watches him as he goes back up the beach and he pours the water into a hole that he had dug out with his hand.

Pretty soon of course very quickly the water was just absorbed in the sand and to his amazement and he saw the little boy go back to the sea and scooped up another bucket of water and went right back up to that hole he had dug in the sand and poured that water in and again the water very quickly vanished just in a matter of seconds absorbed into the sand and finally the little the theologian had all he could take he said to the boy he said what are you doing?

and the boy little perturbed that that this guy had stopped him from his great task he said well I'm trying to put the ocean in my hole and of course then it dawned on Augustine that he was behaving just like like that little boy he was trying to cram the ocean of God's truth about himself into his little box of brains and he was having no more success than that little boy was trying to put the whole ocean in a little hole see the depth of the riches and of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God the mystery of God second truth I think we learn here is the mastery of God the mastery of God oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid this is the a statement really of the absolute mastery of God over all things and again we have the same three truths about the nature

of God here they are named a little bit differently and they are given to us in reverse order in verse 33 that we looked at just a moment ago we have riches wisdom and knowledge in that order but here in verses 34 and 35 we have first the mind of God that's his knowledge then the counsel of God who can be his counselor that's his wisdom and then these gifts given to God as if he needed anything that's his riches so the same three truths about God but in reverse order and so it's very poetic isn't it and it is it's a doxology it's meant to be praised I don't know if it's meant to be sung but the point of it is this three times Paul asks who has it's repeated three times who has known the mind of the Lord who has been his counselor and who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid who has who has who has three times and so three times the question is asked and three times the implied answer is what no one has no one has no one has three times all three times and so let's just take all three of those no!

[25 : 49] first of all no one has ever known the mind of God the wisdom of God or the infinite purposes of God now what he has revealed to us about that which is a fraction of it that belongs to us but again the secret things belong to God and who has known the mind of God no one has no one has Paul I think was blessed with possibly more revelation of God's infinite purposes than any other man I really believe that I know we have a lot of Bible writers and maybe that's a bold conclusion but I think Paul who wrote most of the New Testament was given revelation more revelation than any other man any other human man in fact Paul even said that's why he had his thorn in the flesh keep him from going off into pride and so Paul was given all this revelation and yet he could only sketch out little more than a rough outline of it all it seems like a lot to us but in reality in comparison to the great infinite depths of

God's knowledge it's just scant information and Paul was given that and even with that Paul said oh the depth so no one has ever known the mind of God the wisdom of God the infinite purposes of God and no one knows the infinite knowledge of God he who has been his counselor who has been his counselor who among mankind could counsel God on anything well no one God knows everything God is not learning things not discovering things in fact I heard about a gospel song where one line of it goes like this has it ever occurred to you that nothing has ever occurred to God nothing ever occurs to him you're not having mental processes where he's learning things and discovering things and coming to certain conclusions about things based upon information that he's learning he knows every single thing everything and so for a mere man to counsel

God would be like a candle trying to add light to the sun how insignificant in fact that really is not a good illustration because we're not even a candle in relation to God's wisdom I heard a story about a lazy college student who was struggling with one of his final exams an exam in economics just before the Christmas break and it was a test of course that he had not really studied for he was ill prepared for it and in desperation he just scribbled across the bottom of the paper only God knows the answer to these questions Merry Christmas that's what he wrote to the professor he got the exam back it said God gets 100 you get here let's see Paul also says concerning the absolute mastery of

God and no one can give God anything that would add to him add to his wealth that's primarily what he's getting at here can't add anything to God can't give him anything that he's got to somehow repay to you who has given a gift to God that he might be repaid and this by the way is a quote from Job 41 11 at least partial quote from that verse Job 41 verse 11 says this who has first given to me that I should repay him whatever is under the whole heaven is mine it all belongs and not only is he sufficient in himself and nothing needs to be added but he owns everything so the mystery of God the mastery of God and then one last thing the majesty of

God for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever! It's a divine cycle isn't it?

[30 : 33] It's pretty obvious from through to from through to the divine cycle is all about God everything everything is explained by God he's the answer to it all and that's not just some Sunday school little child in Sunday school class who has answered every question is Jesus in a sense that's true God is the answer to it all I read about a certain professor or scientist rather by the name of Robert Jastrow and it seems he was the founder of NASA's Goddard Institute you probably have heard of Goddard Institute some years ago he wrote a book entitled God and the astronauts interesting title for for man who does not profess to be a

Christian and yet does not and in his book Jastrow came to this amazing conclusion he said this he said this is an exceedingly strange development this is his conclusion unexpected by all but the

theologians they've always accepted the word of the Bible in the beginning God created heaven and earth but for the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason the story ends like a bad dream he has scaled the mountains of ignorance and he is about to conquer the highest peak and as he puts himself over the final rock he's greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there all along see the mystery the majesty the mastery the majesty of God for from him are all things through him anything you might receive all things are through him and all of them go back to him to him are all things to him be glory forever amen Matthew Henry and I'll close with this quote Matthew Henry that theologian of oh no 1600s 1700s he wrote this in his comments on this passage he said the main things God wants us to know are clear and plain like a highway open for all to travel but the judgments of his hands are dark and mysterious the road is closed forever to us

God leaves no footprint we must not try or excuse me pry into the mysteries of God but rather bow before him in adoration for things we do not understand Thank you.