



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 11: 33-36

Romans

“Glory to God Alone”

TRANSCRIPT

Well, we come this morning to the conclusion of the three chapters we have been studying for some time, chapters 9, 10, and 11, this great portion of Scripture where Paul explains what has happened to Israel, what will happen to Israel, what in fact will happen to the entire world, and how God has not railed in his promises; his Word cannot fail. So as Paul begins to reflect upon all that he has written, he comes to this magnificent conclusion in chapter 11, his doxology, in which he writes in 11:33-36:

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR?

Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN?

For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let's pray.

Father, all the glory does go to you, and we certainly are reminded of that as we come to this magnificent conclusion to this portion of Scripture. And so we pray, Father, that as we consider these great truths, this great fact, that everything is from

you and through you and to you, that we might be moved to give glory to you. Not just in this moment, but later in the day, tomorrow, the next day. Throughout our lives may we live them in this way: to bring glory to you.

You deserve all that we can give you, more than we can give you. There's not enough praise or worship to give you in this entire world or throughout all eternity. So Father, as we study this magnificent text this morning, give us a sense of your majesty, and may it have its proper effect upon us. It will do that only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We are dependent upon you for everything. We're reminded of that in our text. We're dependent upon you for an understanding of your Word.

By your grace, you've not only given us your Word – all 66 books of the Bible, in addition to the natural general revelation we have all around us in the beauty of the world in which we live – but you've given us a teacher. You've given us an interpreter. You've given us the Holy Spirit, who opens our minds to your truth, who guides us in our thinking, illuminates our minds, enables us to understand. And we pray that that ministry would go unhindered this morning.

That he would open our minds, open our hearts, to receive your truth, receive the worship that's given this morning, and the instruction that's given, and through that, build us up in the faith. Cause us to advance in our knowledge, in our understanding, and make it applicable to us. Apply it to our hearts and our lives, and cause us to live lives that are different.

Make us different from those around us, so that people, when they hear us in our conversation, or when they see us and the way we live, would know that there's something different about those people. And may what they see that is different be Christ in us. So we look to you to bless us spiritually, to sanctify us, draw us close to yourself, change us, but Father, we pray also for your blessings in the material things of life, and we pray for the physical concerns that we have.

There are friends that are sick, and we pray for them. We pray that you would give healing. We pray that you would bless doctors as they attend to those for whom we have a concern. We pray that you would bless them with encouragement in the midst of difficulty. Bless families with encouragement as loved ones suffer difficulty. We pray for physical deliverance, healing, for those in need. We pray for those who are without employment, that you would bless them and open doors of opportunity.

And again, as we do so often, Father, we remember with thanksgiving that all that we have, as Paul tells us this morning in the text that we consider, all that we have comes from you. The employment we have comes from you. The health that we enjoy comes from you. The free time that we have so much of, it comes from you. All these great blessings come from you. We tend to have so much so routinely that we take it for granted, and fail to realize that every moment we have is a gift from you.

Help us to be grateful, Father, and to redeem the time and use it wisely, and use the things that we have in your service, and use them faithfully. And we pray that our time together as we consider you would move us to do that. We pray for our nation, that you'd bless it; you have prospered us in so many ways. We read the newspaper, we listen to news reports, and we hear about violence all over the world; cities in which people are being killed.

And then we think of the peace that we enjoy in this land, the order that we enjoy in this land that again we take for granted. That is because of you, Father; you give us peace. You've done that, and we thank you for that. We pray that it continues. We pray that you bless our leaders with wisdom that they would govern this land in a way that promotes peace, a land in which we pray prosperity would continue.

And yet, Father, those things are really unimportant compared to the great issues of life, the spiritual things of life, and we pray that this land would enjoy more than material, political prosperity and peace, but that it would enjoy and come to know spiritual peace, through faith in Jesus Christ. And so to that end, we pray that you would make us good and effective servants for you, that we would go out from this place and be lights in the world, and may our time together be to that end.

Equip us to do that. Bless us in this hour. Bless us this evening when we return and worship Christ, remember his first coming and what he did for us, his death for us, his resurrection for us, and remember that he's coming again for us. That day may be soon. May we live for it. So bless us now, Lord, as we sing our final hymn, and prepare our hearts for a time of study together, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

A number of years ago, my wife and I visited friends in Switzerland, and spent a few days with them at their summer home in the Alps. While we were there, I

picked up on a few German words. One that stuck in my mind was *schön*, which means “beautiful,” though my pronunciation of it is not, and my wife cringes every time I say it. My Swiss friends tried to help me. I pronounced it all through the week, but it didn’t do much good.

When it came time to leave, we caught a bus down the mountain to the town and to the train station. On the bus, an older couple sat in front of us. They were visiting together in German. You could hear them plainly, but I couldn’t understand anything they said, when the wife happened to look out the window and suddenly exclaim to herself, “Oh, *schön*.” That I understood, and looked out in time to see a majestic view of the mountains.

Now, her response was completely spontaneous. She didn’t look at the scene that she was taking in and say to herself, “How should I respond; audibly, or to myself? What should I say? How do I react to what I’m seeing?” Her response was immediate and natural. What she saw moved her; it compelled her to express herself on impulse, and say, “Oh, beautiful.” And it’s a kind of response that we read from the apostle Paul in these last verses of Romans chapter 11.

“Like a traveler who has reached the summit of an Alpine ascent,” wrote the Swiss commentator Frédéric Godet, “the apostle turns and contemplates. Depths are at his feet, but waves of light illumine them, and there spreads all around an immense horizon which his eye commands.” The lofty peaks that the apostle contemplates are what he has just written in Romans chapters 9 through 11, some of the most majestic passages in all of Scripture.

And no sooner does he begin to contemplate and reflect on them than he breaks forth in a doxology, a praise of God for the greatness of his salvation. “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” That statement, “Oh, the depth,” is much like *schön* – how beautiful, how glorious, how majestic, how absolutely beyond words, is God and his ways.

I don’t know if Paul thought out this statement, or if it came out in an impulsive cry of adoration. I think with Paul’s knowledge of Scripture he was certainly capable of such a statement spontaneously. But what is certain is the impression these great truths made on him was overwhelming. God’s plan of

salvation, and his method of directing history to its appointed end, caused Paul to marvel at the riches of God’s wisdom and knowledge.

“They are deep,” he says. Contemplating these attributes is like looking into a valley from a mountaintop, but it’s a valley that has no base, no floor. It is bottomless; it is fathomless. So he finds that he cannot comprehend it – not fully. So much of who God is and what he does has not been revealed to us. We have 66 books of the Bible, and yet we really know so very little of God and his ways.

But it’s not what we don’t know, but what we do know, what has been revealed, that amazes Paul, and causes this great sense of awe. It is God’s wisdom and knowledge, and his grace abounding to the restoration of Israel and the salvation of the nations that Paul cannot fully grasp. Wisdom is based on knowledge, and God’s knowledge is great. It is inexhaustible. He knows all things – everything that is, and everything that is possible. Nothing is hidden from his sight.

God has never learned. He cannot learn. He knows everything. There was never a time that he did not know everything. He always knows everything, has always known everything, always will; he is omniscient, and the Scriptures bear clear testimony to that. Psalm 139: “O LORD, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down, and when I rise up. You understand my thought from afar, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.”

Proverbs 15:3: “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, watching the evil and the good.” Nothing escapes God’s sight and God’s knowledge. He knows everything about everything and everyone, all the time. He knows the future as well as he knows the past. Now, there are some today in evangelical circles who deny that; those who advocate what is called openness theology. One is Gregory Boyd, a professor at Bethel College.

In his book, *Letters from a Skeptic*, he wrote that “God faces the future with a certain degree of openness. The future is not an entirely 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 is an idea that comes out of speculation about the relationship of God to man’s freedom. It is argued that God can create beings that can surprise him with choices that he doesn’t know in advance.

So God is big enough to create beings that can, in effect and in reality, limit his ability. But there are certain things that God cannot do. The Bible is very clear about

that. He cannot lie. Paul tells us that, the author of Hebrews tells us that. Paul also tells us that he cannot deny himself. He cannot make himself to be less than he is. He cannot cease to be God in any way. So he cannot create a being that would diminish his attributes of knowledge and power.

The notion that God can be limited in any way may be consistent with Plato and the philosophers, but it is completely contrary to the apostles and prophets. Paul’s whole explanation in Romans 9 through 11 is based on the certainty of God’s plan and purpose. If the future were open to God, Paul could not say with certainty, “And so all Israel will be saved.” He has no basis for this doxology that unfolds from Paul’s mind. His joy and confidence are based on the certainty of future events.

The idea that God does not know everything, actual and possible, is theologically preposterous, and it is Biblically unsound. Again, read Psalm 139, or read Isaiah 46:9-10, where the Lord says, “I am God, and there is no one like me.” An openness theologian compares God to us – he makes God like us, but God says that cannot be done. “There is no one like me. I am unique in the universe. I am the Creator. All else is a creation.”

He goes on to say, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times which have not them done, saying, “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all my good pleasure.” God knows the end from the beginning. God knows the future perfectly, and he knows the future perfectly because he has planned it all completely, and no one can frustrate it. There is no uncertainty about the future with God. He is omniscient – thankfully. We could have no comfort in this life if he were not.

He knows our past, our present. He knows our future. He knows our weaknesses. He knows how to care for us. He knows our enemy’s plans, and how to thwart them. He knows the difficulty of our circumstances, and how to deliver us from them. He knows the future, and how to guide us through it. God is all-knowing, and he’s all-wise. God knows every person, every person’s condition, every situation in life, and he has a plan for each and every individual.

And he uses perfect wisdom in selecting and adapting the right means for fulfilling his plan, so that his glory and the happiness of his creatures is secured. In fact, it is really impossible to separate these two attributes that Paul is speaking of here; they belong together. God’s knowledge is wise, and his wisdom is informed,

and the riches of them, the depth of God’s wisdom and knowledge, is revealed in many ways. It’s revealed in his work of creation. It is revealed in his work of providence.

His providence being his all-wise preserving and governing all his creatures in all their actions. God’s work of providence is very much like his work of creation, which may begin in chaos, when everything seems to be formless and void. But God overrules that – in fact, uses all of that in order to bring good out of evil, to bring order out of chaos. He overrules that which is bad to make it right and proper. That is God’s wisdom. God does that by his wisdom.

But nowhere is his wisdom more gloriously displayed than in his plan of salvation, and in his purpose for history. Humanly speaking, the issue of salvation put God on the horns of a dilemma. How was he to save a world that had fallen into sin; that was wrecked and ruined and guilty? He is a good and loving God who desires the salvation of men. He takes no delight in the death of the wicked, but that they turn and be saved. But he’s also a righteous God.

He’s also a holy God, who must punish sin, and punish it justly, and punish it thoroughly. Amnesty for sinners would violate his justice. Judgment on sinners would frustrate his love. So how could a holy God save sinners who deserve judgment, and still remain a holy God? That was God’s dilemma, humanly speaking, as we would look at things, as we would see them and understand them. Of course, it was never really a difficulty for God. God doesn’t puzzle over problems the way we do.

He doesn’t learn. He is all-knowing and all-wise, and his plan is eternal. It wasn’t developed at some point as a stopgap measure. It was eternal; it is as old as God is old; it is forever. And his wisdom is revealed in the solution of a substitute. Christ, God’s eternal Son, became a man, and willingly died in the place of sinners, so that, as Paul wrote in chapter 3 of Romans, “God would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” So how did he solve this dilemma?

He solved it in the cross, through the death of an innocent man whose death was of infinite value, able to bear the punishment of an innumerable multitude, and bring them to God. That’s God’s wisdom. It solves what would seem to be insoluble problems, and we see his wisdom in the way he’s guiding history to its appointed end. God made special promises to salvation to Israel. He promised the nation a kingdom.

And yet those promises seem to have come to nothing—the Jewish people are largely in unbelief.

But all of this was according to God’s all-wise plan, and as Paul has explained, Jewish unbelief led to Gentile salvation, which is to provoke Jewish jealousy, and Israel’s ultimate salvation. That will happen at the end of the age, in connection with Christ’s return, when as Paul said, “the Deliver will come from Zion.” Then there will be blessing not only for Israel, but for the whole world, what Paul called “life from the dead.”

Now, who could have imagined anything like that as one looked at history in Paul’s day? Who could’ve imagined anything like that as one viewed Jerusalem, destroyed by the Romans; the temple burnt and in ruins, the people scattered? Who could imagine that as one looks at history today, and see this magnificent plan that is going to unfold? But God’s plan is guided by his inscrutable wisdom. He will carry it to its glorious conclusion. Godet said, “This is what no philosophy of history has dreamt of.”

Paul called it a mystery. And while we can understand something of it, because he’s given us some revelation of it, he’s given us some knowledge of this mystery, ultimately it is beyond our comprehension. Paul affirms that when he adds “How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways.” God’s judgments and his ways are probably synonymous. We can understand judgments in terms of his judicial acts, such as his condemnation of the wicked; that word is used frequently in that way.

But since the context is dealing more with God’s mercy, and since his judgments are parallel with his ways, we should probably understand his judgments as his decisions, his decrees. Both those words mean basically the same thing; that God’s decisions about salvation and the ways in which he is working out his will in history – all of that is beyond our ability to fully understand. God’s ways are paths that cannot be tracked out, cannot be traced out.

We can’t explore them with our minds, understand the direction that they take, and follow them to their end. They all lead to a good end – Paul has told us that in Romans 8:28 – that “all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose.” And so God knows the way that the paths of our

lives are going. He's plotted the course. But we are not able to comprehend God's ways, and the paths that our lives are taking.

Paul was on the way to Damascus to kill Christians. How could he have possibly known that that was the way for him to the cross and to Christ? John Newton went to sea and became a slave trader. How could he have known that dark path would lead to the light of the gospel and salvation? When a young couple has a child, and it is born with physical problems, they wonder why – how could God allow this to happen? We don't know. Those are the secret things that belong to the Lord.

God's ways are past finding out; they are untraceable for us, but not for him. He has planned the course of our lives, and is guiding our every step according to his wisdom. God's work and ways have been likened to the work of a weaver on a loom. As an elaborate tapestry or carpet is being made, the skillful mixture of colors and designs can only be seen piece by piece, as it is woven.

Now, we might marvel at what we see as it begins to appear, but the full design, what is about to take place, what is about to unfold, is known only to the designer. And it's the same with God's work of salvation in history. We have some revelation of it, and we see some indication of it in history, and in the events around us. We have the Scriptures. We have the evidence of God's providence; we see that in the events around us.

But the full beauty and intricacy of God's work in this world and for all eternity is understood only by the Master Designer. We cannot trace it out. These things are unsearchable. But we must be searching; we must be searching and studying the revelation that we have. There is nothing more important than that – nothing more practical than studying God. No people has ever risen above this idea of God.

So if we are to rise, if we are to grow, if we are to be elevated high in our knowledge and in our character and in our conduct, then we must study God and his ways. It is a subject that is boundless and beyond us. And Paul confirms that from Scripture in the next verses, verse 34 and 35, with three questions. They are rhetorical questions – that means they don't require an answer. The answer is obvious. And again, they indicate that God is beyond our comprehension; God is beyond our control.

“For who has known the mind of the LORD, or who became his counselor? Or who has first given to him that it might be paid back to him again?” Well, the answer is obviously no one. The idea that we could teach God, or give anything to God, is patently absurd, and Paul makes that point from a combination of Scriptures taken from Isaiah 40 and Job 41. The first two questions are from Isaiah 40:13.

They are in the context of God’s greatness, where Isaiah describes him as the Creator who has measured the seas in his hand, and marked off the heavens. He’s counted the dust of the earth, and weighed the mountains in his scales. By his great skill and wisdom and power, he has created the entire universe. But it was not heavy labor for him – it was not difficult. As great as the world and the heavens are, they are small to God.

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are regarded as a speck of dust on the scales. All the nations are as nothing before him; they are regarded by him as less than nothing, and meaningless. Take the universe in all of its glory, all of its splendor, all of its stars, in fact, all of its millions and millions of galaxies. It stretches on and seems boundless, and yet to God, who is infinite, it is less than nothing, and meaningless. He is infinite in his being, knowledge, wisdom, and power.

He is infinite, and man is finite, and the world is insignificant. So in that context, the question is asked, “Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor?” God cannot be comprehended by us, and God cannot be advised by us. His works of creation and providence and salvation are his works alone. The question from Job 41:11 is similar. Job and his friends were in a theological debate about God and his ways with men.

When God finally speaks out of a whirlwind in chapter 38, he silences Job and his friends with questions like, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” and “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?” Then in 41:11, the Lord asks, “Who has given to me that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” We cannot give anything to God. Everything is his. Everything that we have is from him; so God is debtor to no one.

Paul affirms that in verse 36 with his comprehensive statement, “For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.” Those three prepositions—from, through, and to—state the origin, ground, and goal of all things. First, everything comes from God. He is the source of all things, which

means that God is before all things. There was a time before there was time when there was nothing but God. He is eternal. That alone indicates a great deal about God.

He is self-existent, and he is self-sufficient. He has no origin, no beginning. He's always been, and owes his existence to no one and to nothing, which sets him apart from the creation. As I said earlier, he is different from us. He is unique. He's what Karl Barth described as “wholly other.” when he revealed himself to Moses from the burning bush in Exodus 3:14, he explained himself when he explained his name as “I Am Who I Am,” signifying that God always is. He is self-existent and eternal.

In fact, the bush itself illustrated that. Moses was out, you remember, on the backside of the desert, and he saw a bush that was on fire. Now, I don't think it was the bush itself that caught his attention, because Moses would've seen fires out on the desert, as brush under the heat of the sun ignited. But this particular bush caught his attention, arrested his attention, because the bush was burning with fire, but the bush wasn't consumed. It burned independently of the bush; the fire was its own source of energy.

God is like that. He's the only independent being in the universe, and his is the only independent will in the universe. All others are dependent on him. Because he is self-existent, he is self-sufficient. He doesn't depend on anything or on anyone. We are completely dependent on our environment for our existence. We need the air to breathe. We need the ground to stand on. We need one another for fellowship. It's not good that man be alone. We need company. God doesn't.

Before the worlds existed, in all eternity past, God was firmly grounded in himself, and sufficient in himself. He was not lonely. He didn't create man to give himself worshippers, or to give himself company, or helpers. God is a Trinity, and has always lived in perfect happiness and fellowship in the Godhead. He has no origin. He has no needs. All things were created by him out of nothing, *ex nihilo*. He spoke everything into existence. He thought it all into existence.

It was created by divine fiat. He willed everything to be, and he continues to will everything to be. All things continue in their existence because of him. They are all sustained by him. They are through him, Paul says. “Your very existence at this very moment is because God's mind is upon you, and he is willing you to be. Paul

explained that to the Greek philosophers on Mars Hill in Acts chapter 17 when he told them who God is.

He had been in the marketplace, and he had been examining the altars and the idols that were down there, and came across that one that was to an “Unknown God.” They thought that if they’d missed one, well, they’ll put an altar to him, sort of ties up all loose ends. So Paul; says, “I’m going to explain to you who that unknown God is. He is the God in whom we live and move and exist,” he says.

Now, these were great men – great men of their day, standing on Mars Hill, beneath the great Acropolis, monument to man’s skill and order and beauty—a magnificent structure. Below them was the marketplace where men were doing business, making money, speaking to one another, doing the bashes of the day. All of this was going on, and here were these men, thought to know so much, the philosophers of their day.

And Paul is saying to them, “You philosophers, you men of brilliance, you don’t know the fundamental thing about your existence—where you came from, where you’re going, why you’re here—who that God is that you’ve built an altar to. And so you really know nothing. For all your knowledge, you’re empty. This is the one in whom we live, and move, and exist. God sustains you and the air that you breathe. God sustains you and the very thoughts that you think.

“The ground on which you walk, God sustains. He sustains the universe by the very will of his power. And the reason for that is found in the third preposition: all things are to him. Everything belongs to him, and he is the goal of everything. The reason for our existence is not found in ourselves. It’s not found in reaching our goals. It’s not found in our own happiness, and making a name for ourselves. We were created, and we are sustained for him. That’s true of all things.”

And that is true in a special sense for the Christian. Our new birth, our salvation, can only be understood in terms of this formula: from him, and through him, and to him. God planned our salvation from eternity past. He chose us from before the foundation of the world – Ephesians 1:4. It was all according to his will; not due to anything in us. Christ redeemed us by his sacrifice, and the Holy Spirit called us, and brought us to a saving knowledge and saving faith in Jesus Christ.

We are from him, and we are sustained in our salvation by him – we are through him. Our sanctification, our growth in holiness, is his work in us. What we

do, the thoughts we think, the obedience that we show – all of that ultimately comes from God’s work within us, his sanctifying work, the work of the Holy Spirit. He keeps us alive and steadfast in our faith. We face all kinds of temptations and dangers daily; far more than we realize.

We are in a constant battle, an invisible war, living in a continual hail of fiery darts from the evil one. But we continue to persevere because of him, and in the end, he will certainly bring us, his children, his chosen ones, to him – to himself, forever. As Jude said at the end of his brief epistle, “To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy” – God will do that.

He is able to bring us to himself, and he will certainly do that, and bring us to himself blameless and joyful. We cannot take credit for that. All of the praise, all of the glory goes to God alone, and that is what Paul says. “To him be the glory forever. Amen.” That’s the goal of all things. Everything that God does is ultimately to him. It is for him. It is to display his glory forever. Now, how strange that sounds to us. We are not used to thinking like that. We are used to thinking first of ourselves.

Of our achievement, of our advancement, of our happiness, of our glory; but God’s plan is different. Its ultimate purpose is to glorify himself. That is not selfish. That is righteous. He is infinite. He is perfect. He is holy. He is the greatest good. So it is right that he make the revelation of the highest good the ultimate end of all things. The English Puritan Stephen Charnock wrote, “Since nothing is to be esteemed good but God, nothing can be the ultimate of God but God himself and his own goodness.”

Because God himself is the highest good, then it is the right thing for him to reveal the highest good; to reveal himself and his glory, and so God has done that. God created the world in order to reveal himself and his glory, and that is the ultimate end of all things. That is our purpose in life. It is to glorify our Creator and Sustainer, to glorify our Savior and God. We are to do that in everything. It is to be the governing principle of our lives. That’s why this text is so significant – it is so practical for us.

What can be more practical than informing us of what our goal and our mission in life is? We often wonder, or we hear people ask the question, “Why am I here? What is the purpose of my existence? Where did I come from? Where am I

going? Why am I here?” This informs us of our place in the universe; we’re to be glorifying God. Paul told the Corinthians that in 1 Corinthians 10:31 and he stated it in the most practical way.

He says, “Whether then you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” Eating and drinking is to be done to God’s glory. In other words, the most mundane, simple things are to be done to God’s glory. And if that’s the case, if the simple things are to be done to God’s glory, what about the great and the magnificent things? The point is everything that we do is to be done to glorify God. When we do that, we live the best lives.

We live the best lives because, as I said, we are living according to our place in the universe. We’re doing what we were intended to do. We also live the best lives because as we follow him and honor him, we become increasingly like him. We are turned outward toward God, rather than inward toward ourselves, and so as a result we live increasingly selfless lives. We can’t be turned out toward God and at the same time be turned inward toward ourselves.

If we’re turned outward toward him and begin to live for him, we don’t live for ourselves. We live for God, and for his purpose, and for his creatures, and so that is the most helpful life, that is the most honest of lives, that is the most industrious kind of life, because we live not for self, but for God, and in living for God, we are living for the highest good. All of life is to be brought under this principle of glory to God. I once saw a good reminder of that in the city of Heidelberg.

In an old part of the town there is a beautiful old hotel and restaurant. It’s about 300 years old, I guess, and at the top of the building, in gold letters, are written the words, *Sole Deo Gloria* – Glory to God alone. It’s not on a church, but on a place of business, which testifies that business life as much as church life is holy, and is to have as its object, its purpose, glorifying God. That is our chief end in life. The bottom line is this: it’s not about us. It is all about him.

And wisdom is understanding that, adjusting to that, and living for it. that is where happiness and fulfillment lies. As we understand who God is in his greatness, who we are in our smallness; as we understand what he has done and is doing and will yet do, we will want to glorify him in all that we do. It will become natural. It will be spontaneous, as natural and instinctive for us to praise God as it is to look at a glorious mountain and say, “Oh, beautiful.”

It will become the natural outworking of our lives, so it is important that we learn this great principle. It is important that we get a clear and a big vision of God – one like Paul had – because we cannot live higher than our idea of God. A.W. Tozer said, “The first step down for any church is taken when it surrenders its high opinion of God.” And so the first responsibility of a church is to declare God clearly, and declare him in his greatness, and unfold the majesty of our great Triune God.

We must be pursuing the knowledge of God. We must seek to understand his greatness, and know him as Paul did, whose knowledge caused him to say, “Oh, the depth of the riches.” The way we think about God affects the way we serve God. It affects the way we live with men. It affects the way we die. John Chrysostom was one of the great preachers of the fourth and early fifth centuries. His name means “golden-mouthed.”

But his preaching angered the Empress, who exiled John to the Black Sea. The journey was a hard one; he didn’t survive it. His dying words were, “Glory be to God for all things.” That should be our desire; that should be the aim and the purpose of our lives. God will be glorified in all things. He takes no delight in the death of the wicked, but still, the death of the wicked will glorify him. It will display his perfect justice.

So if there’s anyone with us this morning who’s without Christ, and you die without Christ, it will be a tragedy, but it will not be wasted. God will still get glory from it; but how much better to give God glory as a display of his great mercy and wisdom in salvation through the cross of his Son? That is where God’s glory was demonstrated in its greatest manifestation, when God’s holiness and justice and his love met in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

In the sacrificial death that he died when he paid for our sins at his own expense and obtained life for his people. All who believe in him receive that life. All who believe in him become great manifestations, now and for all eternity, of God’s grace, mercy, and love. So if you’re here without Christ, believe in him. The moment you do, you will receive from him the forgiveness of sin and life everlasting, and you will have the ability to do what you are intended to do.

To live according to your rightful place in the universe as one who gives glory to God. May God help you to do that. Let’s pray. Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. Words are inadequate to unfold such a magnificent text,

such a lofty thought; it escaped even Paul himself. But we can thank you for your wisdom and knowledge and salvation; that what is a dilemma to us, an insoluble problem, is solved by your knowledge, your wisdom.

Solved in a substitute, the Lord Jesus Christ, who reconciles the world to you; we thank you for him and for his death and for our salvation. It's due to no work of our own. Left to ourselves, we'd be swept away in judgment. Thank you for your goodness, your mercy, your kindness, and your love toward us. May our lives be to your honor and glory in all that we do and think; and we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.