

Series on The Prayers of the Apostle Paul  
Romans 11:33-36  
Sermon #15  
August 27, 1995

LOST IN WONDER, LOVE AND PRAISE  
L. Dwight Custis

Alright. Turn in your Bibles, this morning, to the Book of Romans chapter 11.

We are going to be looking at the last four verses of the chapter, which really concludes the long doctrinal section of the Book of Romans. Obviously, as Paul got to this section, his heart was gripped with thanksgiving and praise in a very unique way. We have one of the great doxologies of Scripture in the last four verses of this chapter. Let me read them for you. I am sure that they are so familiar that many of you have committed them to memory. Beginning with Romans 11:33 where Paul writes:

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Then quoting from Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 40, he says:

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?"

Then he concludes: "For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

If you have noticed my subject for this morning, perhaps you have recognized that it is a line from a very familiar hymn. As I was thinking about a subject for this passage, these words came to my mind, but I could not remember the hymn that it came from. Do you ever have that problem? I took our Trinity Hymnal and started through, looking for it. I thought they were the last words of the last stanza of a hymn. I would be very happy if somebody would publish a concordance for hymns. That would be helpful, because when you get a line of a hymn, you have to look through seven hundred hymns to find out which one it is. Fortunately, this was in the four hundreds, I think, so I only had to go through half of the book. It is the hymn, "Love Divine, All Loves excelling." The last verse reads like this:

Finish, then, thy new creation;  
Pure and spotless let us be:  
Let us see thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in thee;  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heav'n we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

Those are the words that I have taken as my subject. It seems to me that when Paul got to the end

of what is chapter 11 he was lost in wonder, love, and praise, as he marvelled at the greatness of our salvation.

As you can tell from the stanza itself--I am lifting these words a little bit out of the context of the hymn, because the one who wrote this hymn was thinking about heaven. When we see the new creation completed in us and realize all that salvation means to us, then we are going to be lost in wonder, love, and praise. I am sure that that is going to be true. We are going to be able to praise the Lord then for His salvation in a way that we do not have the wisdom to praise Him now. So I am not going to argue with Charles Wesley about that, because he is right on target when he speaks of praise that we are going to be giving to the Lord when we stand in His presence.

The prayer that we are considering today shows that there are times here on earth when it is possible for the child of God literally to be carried away with praise and amazement at salvation and the manifestation of God's love in redeeming us. It is almost like he was transported to glory itself having all these truths so fresh in his mind. He had been contemplating the wonders of our salvation: how the Lord meets us in our sin; declares us just through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, completely apart from any works of our own; and then works in our lives to sanctify us and to prepare us for heaven, which ultimately is going to mean glorification for all of us. In chapters 9, 10, and 11, you see how God's promises to Israel are going to be fulfilled. As he was directed by the Spirit of God to see how all of these loose ends, so to speak, were going to be brought together, and God was going to complete all of His purposes. His heart was just lifted up to the Lord: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" And he penned these words which we certainly could not pass over in considering the prayers of the Apostle Paul.

Perhaps there have been times in your life when you know what Paul was experiencing here, when your life has been so much under the power of the Word of God that your soul really soared to heights that you had never experienced before.

E. M. Bounds has written a wonderful little book called *Power Through Prayer*. He tells the story of a man by the name of the Marquis Durenté. A Marquis was a nobleman in Europe. I think probably this man was in England, although I do not know anything about him except what Mr. Bounds has included in his book. He was a man of wealth who had servants. He told one of his servants one morning to call him from his devotions in thirty minutes. When the servant looked in upon him after thirty minutes, he saw that he was so occupied in his prayers and praises that he was hesitant to interrupt him, so he let him go on. Three and a half hours passed and the servant felt that he had to call his master, so he interrupted him and called him. As the Marquis came out of his room he remarked that the half hour was so short when he was communing with Christ.

Bishop Hanley Moule, minister of the Church of England in the past century, a very great and devout man of God, expressed in ways that are beyond what I could say as he describes Paul's heart and Paul's experience here at the end of Romans 11. I want to read this to you this morning because it is so excellent. He says, as Paul came to what is Romans 11:33,

"Here the apostle's voice, as we would seem to listen to it, pauses for a moment as he passes into unspoken thoughts of awe and faith. He has now given out his prophetic burden, telling us Gentiles how great has been the sin of Israel, but how great also is Israel's privilege and how sure His coming mercy. Behind this grand special revelation there still rise in his soul those more majestic forms of truth which he has let us to look upon before: the righteousness of God, the justifying grace, the believing soul's dominion over sin, the fulness of the Spirit, the coming glory of the saints, the emancipated universe, the eternal love. What remains after this mighty process of spiritual discoveries, but to adore?"

Then Bishop Moule continues:

"We also prostrate our being with the apostle, with the Roman saints, with the whole church, and with all the company of heaven, and give ourselves to that action of pure worship in which the creature sinking lowest in his own eyes, yet out of his own sight altogether rises highest into the light of his Maker. What a moment this is, what an occasion, for such an approach to Him Who is infinite, the infinite and personal fountain of being and of redemption. We have been led from reason to reason, from doctrine to doctrine, from one link to another in a golden chain of redeeming mercies. We have had the dream of human merit expelled from the heart with arrows of light, and the pure glory of a grace most absolute, most merciful, has come in upon us in its place. All along we have been reminded, as it were, in fragments and radiant glimpses that these doctrines, these truths, are no mere principles in the abstract, but expressions of the will and love of a person, that fact full of eternal life, but all too easily forgotten by the human mind, when its study of religion is carried away, if but for an hour from the foot of the Cross and of the throne. But now all of these lines converge upon their origin. By the Cross they reach to the throne through the work of the Son, one with the Father. For the Son too, it is written that all things are through Him and unto Him, through His work and in it we come to the Father's wisdom and knowledge which drew the plan of blessing, and, as it were, calculated the furnishings of all it means. We touch that point where the creature gravitates to its final rest: a vision of the glory of God. We repose with profound rejoicing silenced before the fact of mysteries too great for our vision. After all the revelations of the apostles, we own with him in faith with an acquiescence deep in our being the fact that there is no searching, no tracking out, the final secrets of the ways of God. It becomes to us wonderfully sufficient in the light of Christ to know that the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, is also sovereign, ultimate, His own eternal satisfaction that it is infinitely fit and blessed that as His will is the true efficient cause of all things, and His presence the secret of continuance, so He is Himself their final cause, their end and their goal. They fulfill their idea, they find their bliss in being altogether His."

So you can see that others have marvelled at these words of the Apostle Paul which we find at the conclusion of this section. It is no wonder that we find such an expression of praise and worship to God coming at the end of this passage.

Now. How was it that Paul's heart was raised to such heights of glory and praise? Was it something that he was actually seeking?

I think that we would have to say, No. It was not an experience that he was seeking. Perhaps he did not even know that such a thing was possible. But it came to him as a result of the deep

understanding that he had of the truths of salvation and of his meditation upon those truths. The more we enter into an understanding of what Paul wrote in these first eleven chapters, the more we will enter into the worship that filled his heart as he came to this point in the epistle.

We have to remember that when we talk about the Apostle Paul, there was a time when his idea of salvation was completely different from what we find here in the Book of Romans. But the Lord saved him and the Lord revealed these truths to him and guided him word by word as he wrote them down, and his heart was literally overwhelmed when he came to the end of it: Thinking of the knowledge and the wisdom and the greatness and the majesty of God. So he had to express all of this worship to the Lord as he did here.

Throughout these first wonderful eleven chapters of Romans Paul has guided the Roman church and all believers since that time step by step through the glorious truths of salvation. It all has to do with God--His goodness, His mercy, His grace, His love--and all of this in the context of His righteousness, because He did not in any way violate His own righteousness in what He has done in saving you and me from our sins. God did not, and God could not, lower His holy standards in providing for us through Christ our justification, our sanctification, our glorification. And no passage could possibly be clearer than the one before us of all the glory and honor and praise for our salvation which belongs exclusively to God. You notice that he does not say anything about himself, nothing about his accomplishments. None of the glory came to him. None of the glory comes to us. All of the glory belongs to the members of the triune Godhead: The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Now let me enlarge on this for the few moments that we have together this morning.

As you look at this you will notice that God is mentioned in verse 33. Then, as you move into verse 34 he mentions the Lord. I have expressed to you before, and I think that this is true, there may be some exceptions in the New Testament, but I think generally that when the apostles speak of the Lord in the epistles, they are talking about the Lord Jesus Christ. I mentioned in reading to you that verses 34 and 35 are actually taken from Isaiah 40:13-14. If you were to read those verses, you would find that the question actually, instead of "who hath known the mind of the Lord?", Isaiah said, "Who hath directed the Spirit of the Lord, or being his counsellor hath taught him?" Apparently, what Paul applies here to the Lord Jesus Christ was originally written as applying to the Holy Spirit, so, in a way, it really does not make any difference in a passage like this whether you are talking about God the Father or God the Son or God the Holy Spirit, because from the first eleven chapters of Romans we see that all three persons of the Godhead are involved. But in interpreting the passage, I think that when Paul said, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" he is thinking about what the Father has done in planning our salvation. Then, beginning with verse 34, "Who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" Here it seems that he is talking about what the Lord Jesus Christ has done in carrying out the will of the Father. It is not because somebody advised Him other than God, or that we have done something in obligating God to us so that salvation is actually God rewarding us for something that we have done. But the Lord Jesus Christ came, as we all know, in fulfillment of the Father's will, though

we deserved anything and everything but what we have in this glorious salvation of ours. So the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are all so intimately involved in the work of our salvation that statements like we have here can be applied to any one of them: The Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit. All of them, all three, are deserving of praise for our salvation, but none of the praise comes to us. I am sure that you agree with that, knowing the sinfulness of your own heart.

So let's look at verse 33 as a reference to God the Father where he says, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

Notice that there are four things about God which are very apparent in our salvation: His wisdom, His knowledge, His judgments and His ways.

He prefaces the first two by saying, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!." In connection with God's judgments he used the word unsearchable, and with God's ways they are past finding out.

James Denney, in his commentary on Romans, says that the word depth "is a universal figure for that which is immeasurable or incalculable. Nobody will ever be as wise as God is and nobody will ever know as much as God knows. God never learns anything because God is perfect in His knowledge." We need to remember this sometimes when we question God's dealings with us. God's knowledge is so great that it actually amounts to omniscience, all-knowledge. It is probably most correct to say that God's wisdom is the application of His knowledge in His dealings with men and nations, especially where salvation is concerned.

We sing the hymn sometimes:

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!  
Oh, the love that brought it down to man!  
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span  
At calvary!

Remember that you and I must not let the Gospel become a commonplace thing to us when we see what God did in His infinite knowledge and in His infinite wisdom in providing a salvation for us that would not be a violation of His own righteousness. The only way that that could be done was for His sinless, spotless Son to come into the earth as a man and bear our sins in His body on the tree, taking our penalty upon Himself that we might be declared righteous in the sight of God, because our sins were taken care of.

God's judgments and His ways, which Paul mentions in the second part of this, are unsearchable and past finding out.

In Williams' translation of the New Testament, he renders the latter part of the verse this way, "How unsearchable His decisions, and how mysterious His methods."

It seems that in the first part of this verse Paul is talking about God designing salvation, and in the latter part of the verse he is talking about the way in which He has decided to carry out this salvation and the methods that He has used to bring His people to Himself. You think about that as it applies to your own life. How amazing have been God's methods in drawing you to Himself and awakening you to your need and granting you faith, because we are a people who because of our sin were not interested in God, were not interested in salvation. We try to do away with the word sin. Paul himself was as zealous toward God as he thought, but he knew once he met the Lord Jesus Christ that everything that he had done up to that time, seeking to please God, was actually displeasing God, and he was moving himself just as fast to hell as he could possibly go with all of his religious activities and with all of his attainments. Here, as he undoubtedly goes through all of this, thinking of the decisions that God had made concerning him and the methods that God had used to bring him to the Saviour, he says, "How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

When we get to heaven, I am sure that we are going to be talking about that even more. Here he obviously would have to think of the great doctrine of election, why God has chosen to save some and not to save all, and why He has even chosen those whom He intends to save and moved upon their hearts. It would include the ways in which the Lord works in our lives not only in bringing us to Himself, but in sanctifying us, the experiences that He gives us, the way He opens our eyes to the truth, the people that He uses in our lives. You can insert into this verse the spiritual biography of every child of God. Nothing but amazement fills the heart of the Apostle Paul as he thinks of this.

Isaiah informed the Lord's people long ago, long before Paul wrote these words, that God's ways and God's thoughts are not only completely different from ours, but they are higher and better--infinitely higher and better. They are completely without fault. When you break this down to individual believers, as Paul obviously was thinking of those who were saved in Rome, then it truly is marvelous, isn't it, to see what God has done in our lives. All of these grand truths that make up our salvation did not make the Apostle Paul uneasy with God, or disappointed with God, but brought from His heart the highest praise and adoration. The more we understand the truth that he wrote here in this Epistle to the Romans, the more we are going to share his amazement and his praise and his adoration of the God Who has ordained our salvation.

Moving from verse 33 to verse 34, let me follow through on what I have suggested. It seems that he is now speaking about our blessed Lord, the Lord Jesus Christ. As I have said several times this morning, we have Paul's quotation of Isaiah 40:13-14. Isaiah 40 would certainly have to be classed as one of the great chapters of the Old Testament. He raises some question here: Who has known the mind of the Lord? He means, Who has known the mind of the Lord thoroughly. We know the mind of the Lord only in as far as He has revealed it and revealed it in His Word. Even then our understanding is very limited, isn't it? As long as we live we are going to continue to plumb new depths in the Word of God. God has never had a child of His go through life and learn everything that is possible to learn from the Word of God. So we can never exhaust the meaning of all that the Lord has told us in His Word, but what He has revealed helps us to see how much we need to adore God for what He has done.

It is sure, it is certain, isn't it, when he says, "Who has been His counsellor?" I think there have been times in all of our lives when we would like to have counselled the Lord a little bit, because in one way or another we may be dissatisfied, or perhaps baffled a little bit by the way the Lord deals with us. But none of us, and this goes for every child of God who has ever lived--think of the people of God who were mentioned in the Scriptures, men or women--none of us has ever been qualified to teach the Lord something that He does not know because He is infinite in His knowledge and wisdom. None of us has the right to tell Him what to do. That is what a counsellor does: Tries to convey information and advice. Man had absolutely no part in planning salvation, nor in the way that it should be worked out.

You know, always, when I speak, and I am sure this is true of our elders and all of you who teach the Word of God, we have an idea of what we want to get across to the people who are listening. It is most humbling, and yet it is revealing of the great work that the Lord has given us to do, when somebody comes up and tells you something that they got out of your message that you did not even have in mind, something that they got from the Word as you were speaking which obviously was an indication that God was ministering to them to meet special needs that you had no idea of what was going on in their lives. So we do not have any part in planning it, we do not have any part in the way that is worked out. We are utterly dependent upon our Lord to do what is pleasing to Himself. He sends forth His Word, as we have heard many times, to accomplish that which pleases Him. We do not advise Him as to how that should be.

Neither, when we look at verse 35--and this would have special application to the Apostle Paul--neither can any of us say that we have done anything that makes God obligated to save us. That is the idea that most people have about salvation: That if I do enough and work hard enough and show my sincerity, at the end of the road I am going to be rewarded with salvation. Paul raises that question. That is not what he is talking about in the first eleven chapters. That was his idea of salvation before he came to know the Lord Jesus Christ, but he did not obligate God to himself. In fact, he found that all the things that he had been doing, supposedly, to serve God, were only increasing the sins that were in his own heart.

We can say from the question that comes there in verse 35, that we never take the first step toward the Lord. We do not seek Him, He seeks us. Man did not even ask God to provide a way of salvation. No man has that wisdom. We would all have been content to die in our sins, if God had not graciously intervened to meet our needs. What God does with us and what God does for us is always done in pure grace. God is not in debt to any of us. Then Paul comes, after asking these questions, to let us see what the real situation is. "For of him (speaking of Christ), and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Words very similar to this are mentioned by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Colossian church and applied to the Lord Jesus Christ. I agree with you that these words could apply to God.

Now. How important are prepositions in Scripture? Notice that he uses three here: of, through, and to. Of him, through him, and to him.

Strong defines the Greek word of, and for you Greek scholars it is the preposition ek, as

designing the source or the starting point from which action proceeds. He is talking here about salvation. So the source, or the starting point, of our salvation is the Lord. Through, which is the preposition *dia*, Christ is the channel through Whom all of this saving work is accomplished. No man comes to the Father, except through Him. He is the way, the truth, and the life. There is no salvation in any other. The Bible is very exclusive on the subject of salvation. If you are depending upon anyone but Christ, then you do not have salvation. As Dr. Johnson brought up for us, if you try to add anything to Christ, you do not have salvation. A person who is circumcised in order to be saved is a person to whom Christ shall profit nothing. Then, *to* is the Greek word *eis*, unto, all things have been designed for His glory. He is the source. He is the channel through Whom salvation comes to us and all things are designed ultimately for His glory.

Spurgeon said, when he was dealing with this verse, that "no one ever lived, with the exception of our Lord, who could ever do justice to this great text. It goes far beyond our ability to understand it fully, as well as to comprehend the depth of the meaning." Then he went on to say this: "It is laid down by the Apostle Paul as a general principle that all things come from God. They are of Him as their source, they are through Him as their means, they are to Him as their end. They are of Him in the plan, through Him in the working, and to Him in the glory which they produce. It is then little wonder that Paul concluded his doxology with the words, 'To whom be glory for ever. Amen.'"

I think that we all would agree at this point in Paul's writing that he was truly lost in wonder, love and praise. He marveled in the depths of His soul at the work of God in salvation. His own heart was drawn out perhaps in a way that it never had been before with a greater love for the Lord. The words of our text show that words of praise flowed freely from his heart in gratitude to God for such a great salvation. His praise expressed not only joy, but a deep understanding of the nature of salvation, and yet a confession that even the Apostle Paul himself found that the wisdom and the knowledge and the judgments and the ways of God were completely beyond him.

The question for all of us to face--and as I close this morning I want you to think about this--the question is: Do I feel about God and about Christ and about salvation in even something of the same way that the Apostle Paul did? We could add to that question, Can I honestly make Paul's words my words and repeat Romans 11:33-36 as my own, saying them from the heart? and, If not, why not?

The first reason that these words may not strike a responsive chord in your heart is because you are not saved. Tom was telling us this morning in our lesson that the wisdom of God is foolishness to men, and the Gospel is foolishness to men. They have no regard for it. The unregenerate person cannot understand words such as we have here, when a man is just so taken up in praise and thanksgiving to God. A truly saved person might not be able to express himself exactly the same way Paul did, but at least he will say a hearty amen to what Paul said. So if the truth of salvation does not cause you to want to praise God as Paul did, then I encourage you this morning to search your own heart and examine yourself to make sure that you really do know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour.



If your heart is cold and unresponsive to these words, then seek the Lord at this very moment. The Word tells us that we are to seek Him while He may be found and that He is not very far from any one of us. Put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only One Who can save you from your sins. God's promise still stands that if you believe in Him, trusting Him and Him alone for your salvation, you will be saved, and then you will understand why Paul felt the way that he did.

Most of us here today, though, are believers. Perhaps you know the Lord Jesus Christ, but still you do not find your heart filled with praise to the Lord like Paul's was. Maybe you answer this question for yourself, How long has it been since you thanked the Lord from the depths of your soul because of His infinite grace to you an unworthy sinner, that He has lifted you not only from the penalty of your sin, having taken that penalty Himself, but He has broken the power and dominion of sin in your life, and you have the prospect that someday you are going to be like the Lord Jesus Christ? You see, if we cannot praise the Lord daily for His wonderful salvation, then there are ways in which we need to be drawn closer to the Lord too.

What would be the answer for a person, a child of God, who has somehow lost sight of the glory of salvation, and perhaps has let weeks go by without simply saying to the Lord, "Lord, thank You for Your wonderful love and grace in saving me from my sins."

The best suggestion that I can give for the remedy of that is for you to do what Paul had just done. Take a book like Romans and with a prayer in your heart that God would open your eyes to see the truth, wend your way slowly through this book, drinking in the truth, asking the Lord to open your eyes even more to these wonderful things that Paul is talking about. Surely, by the time you get to the end of chapter 11 you are going to find your heart filled with the same kind of praise that filled Paul's heart. It is the Word, you see, that enables us to understand the truth that we can understand, and, in turn, as the Lord shows us again the glories of our salvation, then we are going to say, "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

Father,

Bless these truths to our hearts this morning, as you see our need. We pray that from each one of us there might arise a new note of praise for all that You have done for us and continue to do for us and will carry on to perfection through our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. In His precious Name we pray, Amen.