

“It Ends in Wonder” // Romans 11:30–36 // Romans #23

(Campus Pastors: Introducing/praying over 2020 residents)

INTRODUCTION

One of our core values here at TSC is that we **want to be committed to doing** whatever it takes to reach people:

- **In the Triangle, that looks like opening new campuses**--like the Capital Hills campus you've heard about, opening in just a few weeks, as well as a new one in N Durham that we are pulling together plans for
- It also means **every year raising up and giving away some of our best leaders plant independent churches** in cities all around the United States (like the ones you just prayed for).
 - So far: ***1,152***
 - Never thought I'd be excited about people leaving... not angry
- It also means **continuing to challenge** you in how you might leverage your career to take the gospel around the world. And some of you might **sense God's call to walk away from** your career to do that.
 - **I thought this was encouraging:** After our sermon on Romans 10 a couple of weeks ago, we had 145 new people sign up to go on a short-term trip, and 5 who wanted to start the discussion about going long-term!

Works Consulted:

Romans for You, “Romans 11 Outline,” Tim Keller
“It's Not Too Late,” Joby Martin
“Glory Thieves” (Romans 11:33–36), Matt Chandler
“To Him Be the Glory Forever. Amen.,” Tony Merida
“Your Purpose and God's Glory,” Tony Evans
“This Is Your Life,” Tony Evans

- (Also, last weekend, nearly 200 people (193) stood to declare they were becoming fully fully-committed followers of Jesus.)
- **So, God is moving and we rejoice.**

Romans 11, if you have your Bible // Journal p. 70 // if you don't have a journal, I hope you'll pull out something to take notes on.

- I'm **pretty confident you'll get more out of this study** if you'll write things down and think on them throughout the week
- So, if your **neighbor doesn't have something out** to take notes on, look at them right now and just judge them.
- **No, I'm kidding: Everybody look at your neighbor** right now and say, “*You know, I prayed all week long that I'd get to sit next to you today.*” (For some of you single guys sitting next to that girl, that is literally true!)
- **Listen, I'm pretty sure there is a special note-taking gate in heaven.** It's like the fast-pass line at Disneyworld. Can't prove that--I think it says that in Deuteronomy (which is where pastors always quote from when they are making stuff up).

Today's is a wonderful passage. Definitely memorization-worthy.

It's a hymn--a song--that Paul wrote in reflection on all that he's just explained.

Throughout Romans 9–11, you might recall, Paul has been considering the question, “***Did God fail in keeping his promise to make Israel a blessing to the nations?***”

God had promised, you recall, not only to bless Israel with salvation but also to use them to bring that blessing to the nations. And now, they've turned away. **So, has God failed?**

Paul's answer (looking at this for 4 weeks): ***Absolutely not.***

- After all, God built his church with Jews (*All the Apostles were Jews*).
- Furthermore, to this day he's preserved a remnant of Jews who trust him
- And, finally, we know the best is yet to come. One day, Paul explains, God is going to bring the nation of Israel as a whole back to God, and when that happens, Paul says, that is going to spawn the largest worldwide gospel movement in history.

In the meantime, the irony is that **even Jewish rejection of the gospel** has blessed the Gentiles by affording the Gentiles a unique opportunity to hear the gospel--(by pushing Apostles out of the synagogues and into the streets it gave Gentiles an opportunity to hear)

So, yes, Paul says, **God has kept** his promise to the Jews.

Paul starts to summarize everything in vs. 30: ³⁰ (Just) as you (Gentiles) once disobeyed God but now have received mercy through their disobedience (IOW, because Israel has disobeyed, you Gentiles got a unique opportunity to experience mercy), ³¹ so they too have now disobeyed, resulting in mercy to you, so that they also may now receive mercy. (God's mercy toward you is going to lead them to mercy, because it is going to make them jealous for what they lost and they are going to come back to God!) ³² For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may have mercy on all.¹

¹ Vs. 31 in ESV

And then, **Paul's emotions just seem to get the best** of him and he explodes in praise.

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!

How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!

- ***What kind of God is so gracious, Paul muses that he turns even our disobedience into blessing?***
- ***What kind of God takes our rejection of him and uses it*** as part of his good plan in our lives?
- God took our *disobedience* and used it as the instrument of our salvation.
- The **even clearer illustration** of this, of course, is the cross:
 - Wasn't the **cross the ultimate act** of human rebellion? Yes. Yet wasn't it **also THE instrument** of our salvation?
 - God **didn't save us despite the cross**; he saved us through the cross.
 - Which means **the cross was simultaneously the expression of our rebellion** and the instrument of our salvation.
 - The **irony of the gospel** is that *we live through the death of the God we murdered*
- **Who but God would do that?**

And so Paul exclaims: ³⁴ For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?

- **Would any of us have conceived such a plan?**
- Do we realize **how much better and loftier and wiser** God is than us?

³⁵ And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid?

This whole salvation thing: Isn't this the most unbelievable outpouring of grace we could ever conceive?

Anybody here want to **ask God to give them** what they deserve? God has not given us what we deserve, praise him--otherwise we'd all be lost. Instead he repaid us with grace where what we deserved was condemnation.

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things.

All things **came from God**; he is the **source of life** in them, and he is the **purpose for which** they exist. *Everything that exists, exists to point out his glory.*

- **Which means that God pursued the salvation process** in a way that would put his power and glory on display.
- That was his **ultimate priority**.
- *"From and through him and to him are all things."* When it's all said and done, he's **designed the salvation process such that none of us will be able to raise our hands** and say, "Look at what I've accomplished" or even "look at what I've become!" but **"Only God**, who else compares to him?

So,

To him be the glory (in all of this) **forever. Amen.**

(5 Crucial Principles of Worship)

I love this passages for multiple reasons, but primarily because it teaches us **5 crucial things about worship**. (And, btw, when I say worship today, I don't mean merely the 20 minutes of singing we do

in here each weekend (or the 60 minutes they do over at SEE); I mean the whole way we think about God and and respond to him.

- **Worship is not primarily a song**
- (The word **WORSHIP**, btw (worth-ship). What you think God is worth.)
- **Sure, that's reflected in the singing** that we do (I mean, lethargic singing surely makes observers conclude: "Well, if they are this bored, the God they are singing about must not be that awesome.) / Worth of your team
- But the **primary way we worship God** is in how we respond to him, how eagerly we obey him, how much we treasure him.

So, here's the first of **5 principles of worship**:

1. All of God's works are designed to lead to wonder and worship

- **The way Paul ends this shows us that in the end**, everything that God has done in pursuit of our salvation is designed to lead us to amazement and wonder.
- **Remember what he said in chapter 9?** **"And what if he did** (all) **this to make known the riches of his glory on objects of mercy that he prepared beforehand for glory?"** (9:23)
- **What if the primary purpose of how God pursued salvation was to make us stand amazed** at the glory of his grace,
 - and what if that *vision was so compelling and so beautiful* that it was **worth any price** to get there?
- **What if the best part of heaven** was seeing God in his glory? I **know that doesn't make sense...**
 - **Here's how we know it: The Bible says that the angels**, who already experience the other joys of heaven--what they stare with wonder at, what they can't get enough of, is the love of God expressed to us in the gospel. And one day, we'll **see what they see**, and even more, because we are recipients of that love.
- What if I told you that **deep down** that's what you've been yearning for your whole life?

- **Christian Counselor Paul Tripp** says that we humans are ‘glory junkies’: We constantly search for something to adore--some athlete’s skill, someone’s intelligence or artistic ability, someone’s strength of character, their superhuman endurance, their riches.²
- We want **something to adore and admire**; something to have ultimate worth and to be worthy of ultimate devotion.
- God has been trying to show us since we were born that he is that **glorious One**. **Psalm 19 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God.”** **Do you know what that means?** It means that through the majesty of creation God shouts at us of his awesome power and beauty!

John Piper says: *“Open your eyes! Do you see it? Do you hear it?”*

He shouts at us through the billowing clouds. He shouts through the endless blue breadth of the summer sky. He shouts at us with gold on the horizon in the morning and through the breath-taking expanse of galaxies and stars at night.

Don’t you see it? Don’t you love it? You were made for this. This is why (we) exist: to see THAT.

In all these things, he is shouting “I AM GLORIOUS!”

*Everything is pointing to **THAT**. This [world] is all husks and ashes. All the glory that we thought was so attractive is pointing there.*”³

The **beauties of the world, St. Augustine said, are only like the ring that a bridegroom gives to his fiancée.**

- The ring is beautiful and valuable and the girl who receives it will doubtlessly find herself staring at its beauty.

² <https://www.christianity.com/blogs/paul-tripp/3-signs-of-being-a-glory-addict.html>

³ From sermon on “The Glory of God” at given at Passion. Quoted by Matt Papa in “The Glory of God,” on This Changes Everything (2011).

- And showing others in annoying ways
- Every insta: nails; pumpkin spice; “hey”; “oh my goodness;” September, “It’s so hot!”
- Annoying, but we understand. But **how tragic** if she ever got so enamored with the ring that she forgot the ring-giver. But she should never forget that the love and commitment to which this ring points is the real treasure.

In the same way, the beauties of creation--nature, art, romance, food, sport--all point us to the love of God. Enjoy them, but never forget what they are pointing to.⁴

C.S. Lewis said that when it comes to the beauties of creation, we humans can be just like dumb animals. **If you try to point out** something to a dog, Lewis says, **the dog thinks you are trying to show him your finger**. He may even start to sniff and lick your finger!

He doesn’t realize the finger has a trajectory. All the glories of the world have a trajectory. They are pointing to--the glory of God.

Paul says, “Look there, because that is the whole point of salvation!”

And, here’s the thing: **developing that vision now** is the way to maintain joy in life.

- **In Romans 8, Paul reveals his own way of possessing joy** in suffering. IT IS THIS VISION.
- He says: **“I am convinced that the sufferings of this present time are not even worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us.”**⁵

⁴ Adapted from St. Augustine

⁵ Romans 8:18

In other words, the glory that is coming is such of an all satisfying, infinitely beautiful, joy producing reality that 70, 80 years of pain will seem as nothing!

I had a friend--my age--who contracted a **very serious and deadly form of cancer**. It looked, and looks, like it may rob him of some of the best years of his life. He said, “People ask me sometimes when I get to heaven if I think I’ll be able to finally understand why this happened or that happened...” He said, “But **based on how I read what Paul** is saying here, I think what I’ll say is ‘What pain’? I can’t even remember it in light of the glory revealed.”

Honestly, **it's hard to imagine what kind of good and glorious ending** can make something like cancer seem insignificant. Or something like the loss of a child. Or a parent leaving. **Paul is not saying** that these are small things. Or that your pain is insignificant.

He's saying that what we find hard to imagine is still, in fact, true.

What drives Paul to worship here is that—even if just for a brief moment—he's caught a glimpse of that future which we find so hard to imagine.

A future with a God so glorious it makes everything else pale by comparison.

The point of everything God has done is to lead you to that kind of vision.

Which leads us to...

2. All Bible study should end in worship

- The fact that Paul ends this examination of doctrine and explanation in an explosion of worship **illustrates for us that the purpose of Bible study is not just to expand our spiritual understanding** but to set our hearts on fire with passion.
- I say this because **for many of you, growth in Christ is primarily growth in knowledge of Bible facts and doctrines**:
 - You love digging deep in the Bible, unpacking original meaning, listening to sermon podcasts and reading books. And I’m right there with you. **I love knowledge**.
 - But **the point of the Bible is not to fill your head with knowledge** but your heart with wonder.
- **For others of you, your interest in Christianity is more practical**: you want to know how God can help you can have a better marriage, a more stable family, a more fulfilling career. And so **you love the messages where I start telling you practically** how this stuff should change your life.
 - **And listen, that’s great**--the Bible is full of wise counsel on ordering your life.
 - But the Bible is not primarily a book of best spiritual practices. It’s a **book to that leads you to wonder..**
 - The **stories in the Bible aren’t there to give you heroes** to emulate, but a Savior to marvel and adore.
- **Nearly 75 years ago an old British pastor named DMLJ** commented that in his day Christians were arguing at whether it was more important that sermons be packed with doctrine or that they be readily accessible with application...
 - **There should come a time** when the pen goes down and the eyes go up and you stop saying, “Oh my God look at what I have to do for you” and you start saying, “Oh my God, look at who you are and what you’ve done for me!”
 - **That vision alone will change your life** more than any list of practical applications.
 - **That’s why DMLJ said, “I spend *half my time* telling Christians to study doctrine and the other half telling them doctrine is not enough!”** Worship is the point!

3. Worship arises with right posture of humility toward God

Our **worship often gets thwarted** by two false assumptions:

The first is that we are smarter or more fair or more compassionate than God. We get into some situation and think, “God, this is the way I would do it.”

The **second is that God is somehow being unfair to us**. That he owes us good things and the fact that bad things are happening to us is unfair.

Paul addresses those false assumptions with two phrases--because both of those assumptions will destroy our trust (and joy) in God:

³⁴ **For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?**

- **Which of us is in a place where we think we lecture God** on the right thing to do?
- Before we lecture God on the right thing to do, we should stop and ask, “Where did we learn these concepts of justice and compassion from?” Wasn’t it from him?
- And now we want to teach him?
- Furthermore, hasn’t the way he has worked out the salvation process showed us what he is worthy of our trust? Just the little glimpses of what we’ve seen him do show us what he is up to.
- Don’t we already see how God took some of the worst and turned it for good? Don’t we realize that given enough time and perspective we’ll see how he will do that with all of it?

That’s the **humility of perspective**. The second is a **humility of unworthiness**.

³⁵ **And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid?**

Like I said, most complaints to God are built on the assumption that God owes us good things and therefore it’s wrong for him to let us experience bad things.

But Paul says, “Not if you understand the gospel.”

What does God owe you? Nothing. Only condemnation. The fact that we got up this morning and took a breath is grace. The **fact that you experience anything**, other than hell, is grace.

The question, if you understand the gospel, is not “God, why are you letting bad things happen to us good people?” But, “Why have you given such good things to all of us bad people?”

Listen: I’m **not saying there’s never a place** to question why God allows certain things happen, or even to lament loudly about some situation you can’t understand. I mean, about 1/3 of the Psalms are like that.

I’m just saying that **behind every question you ask God should be the recognition** that we are, at our core, part of a race that rejected God who **deserve condemnation**.

The humility of perspective and the humility of unworthiness--both are necessary to thrive with joy in your worship.

4. The **best worship is grounded in who God is, not your perception of what he’s doing in your circumstances**

- Paul’s **whole explosion of praise** here arises out of who God is, not his understanding of his circumstances.
- **In fact, Paul still acknowledges that God’s ways for him are still unsearchable and not understandable**. See vs. 33? *“How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!”* (vs. 33)

- I say this because for many of you, you have to *feel* some token of God's love to want to worship. So, when you get back a negative reading on the cancer screen. See marriage reconciled. Get accepted into the school.
- And that's great—you should be **thankful toward God** for those things. In those experiences certainly are tokens and manifestations of God's love for you
- **But his ways are often untraceable, and if your joy in God is dependent on understanding** the particulars of his plan, you're going to be miserable.
- I was listening to some well-meaning Bible teacher the other day explain, "To really praise God you need to know what season you are in." Waiting. Transition. Development. The problem is that it is still built on understanding. I can praise *if I understand* what God is doing
- **But we simply, vs. 34, cannot know his mind. His ways are untraceable.**
- Real joy happens when you trust a God who is faithful in all seasons whether you understand them or not.

The best praise, the most joy-giving praise, is anchored in who you know God to be--and that is not known primarily through his small tokens of his favor in your life--but through his dramatic work of salvation in human history.

Throughout the Old Testament, when Israel went through some dark and troubling time, God would comfort them by revealing to them some name that embodied his character.

- **When Israel was wandering in the wilderness**, God revealed himself as Jehovah Rapha (literally, **I AM**--that's what 'Jehovah' means, I AM--your healer). And he healed their diseases dramatically.
- **When Jeremiah** was discouraged by Israel's persistent unfaithfulness, and said, "How can we survive? We are so sinful!" God said Jehovah Tsidkenu (I will be your righteousness)

- In **Ezekiel's** day, when the people of Israel felt scared and alone and besieged by enemies all around, **God said** Jehovah Shammah (I AM the God who is ever present)
- **When King David** felt lost and confused, with no friends left in the world, **God revealed himself as** Jehovah Raah (I AM your Shepherd)
- **When Abraham** was old and childless **with no hope**, **God said** Jehovah Jireh (I AM your Provider)

How God was all these things to them was unclear--because people in Israel still got sick, and died--how God was all these things to them was unclear **until Jesus showed up**.

And Jesus started to claim the I AM name for himself. (This is what made the Jews so mad, btw: He was claiming to be God.)

But he was **fulfilling all those promises**.

- He was **Jehovah Rapha: the God who healed their diseases**. And not just through his miracles--in the cross he dealt with our diseases at their source: He bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, and by his stripes we are healed.
- Jesus was **Jehovah Tskidenu: God our righteousness**--because at the cross God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that we could become the righteousness of God in him.
- Through his Holy Spirit, he is our **Jehovah Shammah, the God who tells us that he carries us in the palm of his hand and says that no man can ever pluck us out of that hand**.
- **Jesus is our Jehovah Raah, the Lord our Shepherd**--the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep and promises to never leave or forsake us.
- **Jesus is Jehovah Jireh, our provider** -- *the God who supplies all our needs so that we can say with Paul, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*

Do you **want to know what God is really like**? Look at Jesus. Jesus said if we've seen him we've seen the Father. **He's the clearest picture.**

That's what you can hold onto.

- Jesus showed us the **heart of God for every lost sinner**: He's like the father in Luke 15... don't know all there is about ELECTION, but I know with every sinner I talk to, this is how God feels about them
- **At the tomb of Lazarus**, we see that he's a God who weeps with his friends in their pain, even when he knows healing and resurrection are not far away
- Jesus showed us that God is a **God that literally couldn't turn away** from someone in need. Was there ever *anyone* in Scripture he turned away? Sometimes I wonder, "Is he listening?" But he never turned anyone away. He won't turn me away
- **In the cross** I see that he is a God who takes the darkest and foulest plans of men and turns them for our salvation and who prays only for the forgiveness of those torturing and maligning him.

Y'all, there's so much I don't understand. God's ways are, as Paul says, untraceable. **But I know who Jesus is.**

- Remember **Deut 29:29** that we looked at, **"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."**
 - There are secret things, untraceable, unsearchable things about God's ways that **I just can't understand.**
 - **But God's character is revealed in Jesus**, and that is something I can hold on to.

- And one day we will see that all the secret things wove together with the same beautiful pattern we saw revealed in the cross.

(MUSIC)

- **I have a friend who is walking through a particularly difficult chapter, and she** was telling me this week about her situation, and she said, "All the details of this story haven't been pretty, but I know that when it is over the whole story will be beautiful." **The cross and resurrection** show us that. The **character of God** revealed there assures me of that.

This leads finally, to...

5. We can worship even when we don't understand

- Like Paul, and you, **I have a lot of unanswered questions.** Things that don't add up.
 - Listen, as your pastor, I can **tell you what the Bible says**, but my heart is not always at peace with it.
 - **And there are times I sit with people in pain** and think, "God, if you love this person, why would you let this happen?"
 - I have thought that about **things I've gone through**: "*God, you say you love me, why would you not at least give me this, then? I can't see how there would be any bad side in you giving this to me and it doesn't seem that hard for you. I'm not even asking this for me, I'm asking it for someone else." But he doesn't and I just don't understand.*
- But I see revealed in the gospel the evidence of God's goodness. *For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded...*

One of the things I hate: when a worship leader asks, "How y'all feel this morning? How do I *feel*? **That's where we are going to start?**" *It's Sunday morning at 8:00. I feel terrible. Things are going wrong in my*

house. I've got bills I'm not sure how to pay. My kids have me holding on by my last string. I **feel overwhelmed and confused**.

Instead of asking me how I feel, why don't you tell me what I know? Tell me about him whom I have believed and can trust. **I feel terrible**, but I know he is faithful.⁶

Worship is about who God is, not how you feel.

Here's why I am concerned. Some of you **base your understanding of how God feels about you** on your perceptions of what is going on. Do you feel like he loves you and things are going well.

Listen, you're **always going to misinterpret** things if you do that.

God's **ways are untraceable**. But his **character, revealed in Christ, is undoubtable**.

So no, I don't know all that God is doing in every situation. And neither will you. But I know that what he is doing is bathed in love because that's who he is.

And I know that one day all of this pain and confusion will be swallowed up into a glory that will give me such joy that the suffering leading up to it won't even be worth comparing to it.

- I don't understand why God **would allow my friend, with 3 kids**, to get this cancer diagnosis. I don't see any silver lining to it. Candidly, I don't see God's plan in it. **But I know who Jesus is**.
- And I know that **just as God used Jesus' death for good and brought resurrection** out of it, so will he do that with this situation.
- **Where I can't trace his hand**, I can trust his heart.

And one day, like Paul, we'll say, ³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!

Who has known the mind of the Lord, and who has been his counselor?

And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid?

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever and ever, Amen.

Does the name Florence Chadwick mean anything to you? She was the first woman to swim the English Channel.

In 1952 she decided that she **wanted to swim from Catalina Island to the California Coast**. About 26 miles. No woman had ever done that before.

It was a very foggy day that day and she couldn't see. After 15 hours in the water, she looked up at the little boat going beside her there at her mother, and said, "*Mama I can't make it, I can't go any further.*"

Her mother tried to encourage her, but she said, I just can't. But then she went on for another 55 min.

Finally, she gave up and got in the boat, only to discover she was only a half a mile from the coastline. When she was asked later why she quit, she said, "It was because I couldn't see anything. It was too foggy and I didn't make it to the coastline"

⁶ Adapted from Alistair Begg, Ligonier Conference

She said, If I could've just seen the coastline, I could have made it! I just couldn't see.

She waited two months. Got back in the water. This time she not only swam from Catalina Island to California, but she beat the man's world record by 2 ½ hours.

What was interesting is, the second time, when she broke the record, it was more foggy than the first time. **She could see absolutely nothing.** So, they said, how did you do it.

Well, she said, I was ready this time. *And it's real simple: I kept a picture in my mind of the shoreline.* Even though I couldn't see it with my eyes, it was ever before me. I never lost sight of the California shoreline and so I felt like I was always closing in on it. **As long as I lived for the picture in my mind, I could keep slogging through the fog of my challenge.**⁷ (not a Bible verse, but could be)

As long as you can keep living for the picture of future glory in your mind, you can keep slogging through in the fog of your challenge.

The shore in your mind should be Jesus... **He is Jehovah.** He is everything you've ever needed. In everything you've felt insufficient, he's been your overflowing supply.

For all the ways you "are not," he is the GREAT I AM.

So, yes I will, lift you high, in the lowest valley; yes I will bless you name; yes I will sing for joy when my heart is heavy; with all my days, Lord, yes, I will.

Communion (J.D. leads?)

I can think of no better way...

This is the earthly picture of God's glory, the evidence of God's love and the proof of where it is all headed...

(J.D. call teams forward and fence table. Campus teams will lead in taking it.)

Worship teams

⁷ Adapted from "This Is Your Life," Tony Evans

