

To Him Be The Glory Forever

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[0 : 00] I'd like us just to turn for a few minutes back to the passage that we read and I'd like us just to pick up again the last we section from verse 33 where Paul's thoughts both in this chapter and indeed in the whole letter up to this point reach this amazing climax when Paul says, oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsurachable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways for who has known the mind of the Lord, who has been His counselor, who has given Him a gift, a given a gift to Him that He might be repaid for from Him and through Him and to Him are all things to Him be glory forever. Amen. I want us just to spend a wee bit of time unpacking these words that we have tonight but I think to understand it better it's good to just remember where we are in the book of Romans. Romans is such a dense and rich book and when we just jump straight into it it can be a wee bit hard sometimes to know exactly where

Paul's thoughts are but it's important to remember that Romans isn't as complicated as we think as a book it's not it's not too bad and it's really just split into two big parts and it's really helpful if we remember that that chapters 1 to 11 and 12 to 16 are the two separate parts that we have in this book and in many ways you can divide it like this to say that the first part is very much theological and the second part is much more practical and that's a pattern that you very often see in Paul you look at his letters they'll often be rich theology in the first half and then clear practical instruction in the second half and and Romans is a classic example of that pattern so what we read there in chapter 11 is the last bit of the kind of theological section if you like so if you put in a division there we're focusing on the bit that comes just right here towards the end now if you go through Romans 1 to 11 what you find is an amazing explanation of the Gospel and when you think of the letter to Romans that's the one word that should come to your mind let Romans is all about the Gospel it's explaining the Gospel if you go all the way back to chapter 1 Paul says I'm not ashamed of the Gospel it's the power of God unto salvation for all who believe and the rest of the letter is just explaining how the Gospel works and if you think about it in many ways chapter 1 starts out with this announcement of the Gospel and then it kind of if in a way it kind of goes downhill because it starts talking about sin and from the middle chapter 1 to 2 and into the middle part of chapter 3 Paul basically emphasizes everything that's wrong with the world and he highlights the fact that Jews and Gentiles no matter who we are we're all guilty and accountable before God so it starts off in a way with the bad news and then from that point you have this incredible explanation of the good news of Jesus Christ and that that that good news of Jesus Christ has some key elements attached to it Paul focuses first of all on justification the fact that that through faith in Jesus Christ our sin is not not counted to us instead it's placed on Jesus that that that exchange that takes place turns away the wrath of God so that instead of being condemned we can be declared righteous but from that point onwards Paul then elaborates on the incredible difference that it makes to know Jesus so knowing Jesus isn't just about having your sins forgiven it is about having your sins forgiven which is amazing but there's so much more than that we have peace with God we're reconciled to him in fact we are made his children through adoption in fact God himself comes to dwell in us by his spirit and through that work the Holy Spirit transforms us making us more and more like Jesus as we are progressively sanctified all pointing towards the ultimate goal when we will be taken to be with him and glorified with him in the new creation so in many ways Paul starts here he goes down to talk about the depths of sin and then he just soars up to the heights of all the wonder of what God has done for us so I mean if you like the pattern kind of start to you that goes down to talk about sin but then it just marches up this wonderful description you have the end of Romans 8 where Paul says nothing absolutely nothing can separate us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus you then at this little bit in 9 to 11 where Paul talks about the Jews and as we were saying there's that kind of tension in what Paul writes where he has immense sorrow for the fact that the

Jews have rejected Jesus but yet at the same time he rejoices that some like himself have come to faith and although he's sorrowful about the Jews in these chapters because at the moment their hearts are hardened he's optimistic about the future because he said look as the Gentiles come to faith they will become a witness they will help bring the Jews and then the Jews will just be coming back to where they belong anyway because all the promises were given to them in the Old Testament and there's this great hope for the future that Jew Gentile across the world are going to come to faith in Jesus and and it's all just a wonderful summary of the incredible difference that the gospel makes so you've got this great kind of crescendo of theology running from Romans 1 all the way up to Romans 11 and you can never get tired of reading these chapters they're just so full of incredible theology but what I love is the way that section ends because you know you think about all that knowledge that you gain in Romans 1 to 11 you read Romans 1 to 11 you're gonna get a lot of information loads of theological truth it's like a kind of avalanche of theological truth getting poured on to you again and again you can learn all about justification and adoption and the indwelling of the

Holy Spirit and all that kind of stuff and so you could reach at the end of that and you could think to yourself well isn't it wonderful to have all that theological knowledge and Paul could come to the end of that you know and say oh isn't it amazing to know all this stuff isn't it great to have learned so much but yet that's not what he says he says what an amazing God we have and that's what we have in these words he says all the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable are his judgments how inscrutable his ways for who has known the mind of the Lord who has been his counsellor who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid for from him and through him and to him are all things to him be glory forever and ever and it's a great reminder that all the stuff we learn should culminate in us bowing down before God and saying wow what an amazing God you are and that's exactly what Paul does in these words and and I want us just to spend a wee bit of time just digging into these words a wee bit further because even these words themselves reinforce just what an incredible God we have revealed to us through Jesus Christ so we'll just we'll just walk our way through the verses that are on the screen and see some of the things that that were taught so let's start in verse 33 where it says to begin with oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God now I just want to mention a tiny wee translation issued to begin with because if you've got the King James version in front of you or if you've got the NIV in front of you instead of the word and here you'll have the words of the so now doesn't make a huge difference but it's just just want to explain it in case any of you're looking at that wondering why that's the case so NIV King James versions say oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God whereas the ESV says oh the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God and both are preferent legitimate translations and it's okay that you can translate it either way and it doesn't make an enormous difference but the only issue is that the ESV is telling us to think about the depth of three things so you can see that they're the depth of the riches wisdom and knowledge of God whereas the the new international version is telling us to think about the depth of the riches of two things if that makes sense the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God as I said it doesn't make a huge huge difference and my own preference in terms of how it looks is that I think the ESV is well I prefer the ESV translation where we've been told to think about the depth of three things the depth of the riches the depth of the wisdom and the depth of the knowledge of God now it's good to just stop and think about those things a wee bit more together for a moment that word depth is pointing us to the idea of of something that's inexhaustible something that's just in abundance something that is immense so you know when we're talking about the depths we're talking about you know just not being able to see the bottom something vast we're talking about the immensity of these things the idea of inexhaustible abundance inexhaustible abundance applied to riches

wisdom and knowledge of God in all these areas God is so deep so let's start with the riches what are God's riches well when we think of riches we'll often think in terms of material wealth possessions and there's a sense in which of course that you know everything that's material belongs to God as well but I think that that kind of material view of riches is quite a narrow view of riches because in broader terms riches just refer to things that are valuable and this is illustrated really well in one of my favorite films called Richie Rich I don't ever seen that classic movie from about 25 years ago Richie Rich is a young boy whose father is the richest man in the world and the general gist of the film is that the the manager of the this rich family's estate is actually a crook and he's trying to steal the riches of this family and it's all centered around the rich family vault so

they've got this great vault which is where all their most precious possessions are found and this manager this this baddie manager is thinking if I can just get into that vault I'll have all the riches I want and so this is the whole film about this elaborate scheme for him to try and steal what's in the vault eventually he gets into the vault and when he gets in he discovers a pair of baby shoes a pram old toys old pictures and he's like what is all this junk and the rich family are like this isn't junk these are prized possessions because this was all their memories as a family these were the things that that meant the most to them and it gives us a wonderful reminder that that riches is much more than just having loads of money or loads of property or anything like that it's a bird things that are really valuable so what does God value well there's lots of things that we could say but but earlier on in Romans Paul gives us a really important hint because he talks about the riches of God's kindness and forbearance and patience and that's pointing us to the kind of thing that God values kindness patience forbearance grace love these are the things that are really valuable to God these are the riches that God has and what we have been reminded of in this verse is that with God these things are incredibly deep now one of the big tragedies of the world today is that people chase after riches that are shallow people put all their energy into stuff that really is quite shallow clothes we wear car we drive phone we've got salary we take home none of these things really have any depth to them and I think for all of us you know when we reach the end of our lives I don't think that many of us are gonna say you know I wish that I'd earned more or I wish that had a bigger house I think many of us might say I wish I'd loved more I wish I'd shown more kindness and more patience all around us we've got a world that are chasing shallow riches but in the gospel God is offering us true riches joy peace hope security love all the stuff that really matters and verse 33 tells us that with God these riches are inexhaustibly deep now that is incredibly important at a personal level for each one of us because

[14:33] it means that you know when you think about God's patience his kindness his love for you is that ever going to run dry not a chance it's so deep what about the depth of God's wisdom so often our wisdom reaches its limits we face situations that seem impossible we don't know the answer we don't know what to do and I think that can often be the case you know when we take a broad look at society you look at the world around us and you see some of the huge problems that our society faces in terms of poverty and inequality and social deprivation drug addiction or other addictions and all that kind of stuff when you you look and you think what can you do and in these kind of situations we desperately need wisdom we need wisdom for all the challenges that we face as a nation as families as individuals and we are facing the reality that more and more people are growing up confused and disorientated and unsure who they are unsure what to do and on our own our wisdom will very quickly reach its limit and that's why humanity has never ever been able to solve this problem of humanity but God's wisdom is deep and this is where we see that so often we find ourselves looking at specific situations of thinking I don't know how to fix this don't know how to fix the breakdown of families we don't know how to fix inequalities we don't know how to fix corruption even these specifics are too hard for us but if you if you stand back and look at everything that's wrong with the world you just think just don't know you know where to start and yet God God looks at this broken universe God looks at everything that's gone wrong he looks at all the wreckage that sin has caused and he says I'll fix it and in his inexhaustible wisdom he's implemented a plan of salvation whereby all the requirements of a perfectly holy God and all the needs of a broken helpless humanity are perfectly met and at all centers on Jesus Christ that's what Paul has explained up to this point in this letter that God is bringing it all together everything fits together in this perfect plan of salvation that comes from the deep wisdom of God and all of this is again so incredibly practical and incredibly helpful for us because because it means that it does not matter how much of a mess your life is in God will never ever say to you I don't know what to do sometimes we find ourselves in that situation either with ourselves or with others you think I don't know what to do God never ever thinks that he never ever says that and that's a truth we've got to write on to all of our hearts if your life is a mess if you feel like you've mucked things up God's wisdom is deep enough to fix you to heal you to restore you it's a reminder that no one is ever ever too far gone for God and you know when we when we see people who are in trouble who are going through hard times we often say you know they're in the depths they're just in the depths of despair the depths of sorrow and the depths of a mess these words remind us that no matter how far down you've gone

God's wisdom is deep enough to reach you and it's deep enough to reach the people that you know and love who have fallen into the depths themselves so there's the depth of God's riches his wisdom then 30 there's the depths of his knowledge and one level that reminds us of the fact that God knows everything he's omniscient and that's that's emphasized to us throughout scripture there's an inexhaustible depth to God's knowledge he knows how many stars there are he knows the detail of every square inch in the universe he knows the number of hairs on every person's head but what I want us to focus on most of all is the fact that God's inexhaustibly deep knowledge means that he has an inexhaustibly deep knowledge of you he knows you and everything about you he knows your story he knows your hurt he knows your fear he knows your mistakes he knows what you're hoping for he knows what you wish had been different in your past he knows your dreams he knows it all now if God was like us that would probably make us all incredibly uncomfortable because if you all knew everything about me if you knew all my mistakes and all my insecurities and all the stupid things that I've done in my life then I probably want to run a mile I'd want to never meet any of you again and that of course is why when you see people kind of exposing people's mistakes on social media for the whole world to see it's horrendous thing for people to do to one another people can be so ruthless when they learn something scandalous about somebody you know you think when somebody's mistakes are exposed the whole world can just sometimes set them up just to sling mud at them God is not like that because you know to to kind of make a mockery of somebody who's made a mistake in their lives to kind of highlight their errors to throw stones at somebody who's made a mistake what is that it's showel whereas God's knowledge is deep and the fact that God knows us so deeply means that we can be safe in front of him it means that that whenever we are vulnerable before God vulnerable before God you never take him by surprise so it's never the case that God's like you know you finally confess us in before God's like oh well I didn't know you were like that oh that changes everything not at all God says I know I know I've known this all along but I still love you and so when we confess our sins to God we're never going to shock him into hating us when we confess our sins to God we're just telling him what he already knows and we're stepping onto the path for healing it's an amazing reminder that

God's knowledge is so deep and I wanted you to remember that this week that as you go into a new week that God's knowledge of you is so deep so he knows every email that's in your inbox and anything like me that's one of the biggest sources of stress in life you know what's my inbox God knows God knows every challenge that you're going to face this week he knows every conversation that you might have good and difficult he knows every burden that you're going to carry in the week ahead he knows every decision that you're going to have to take and that's why you can go into every week of your lives with one of my favorite prayers that's only two words long you know you can get up tomorrow morning and say to God you know and in that prayer you're recognizing the inexhaustible depth of the knowledge of God and you're also just casting yourself into his care so we're reminded that God's riches of kindness grace patience at inexhaustibly deep God's wisdom for dealing with the problems that we face is inexhaustibly deep God's knowledge of you is so personal so intimate so loving it is inexhaustibly deep and then Paul goes on to ask a couple of questions he says how I'm searchable at his judgments how inscrutable are his ways and then he follows up with the quotations that come quotations that come from Isaiah chapter 40 and Job chapter 35 chapter 35 he says for who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid so we've been reminded here that God's knowledge the depth of God's wisdom and knowledge is far far deeper than ours and that's pointing us to a world view that runs right through the whole of this letter to the Romans and the world view that's really central to to the Bible the fact that God is creator and we are creation so I've probably drawn this before you have the creator creation distinction and this is crucial to a biblical world view the fact that God is creator we are creation so all of history all of the universe every human everything is in the we circle and the big circle is God our creator distinct from us God is utterly huge we are so tiny and when we recognize that that's that's how we stand before God that he is created we are creation he is infinite eternal and unchangeable we are tiny that helps us understand that it's absolutely crazy for us to think that we know the mind of the Lord or that we can be his counselor and it's ludicrous for us to think that we could give him a gift that he might be repaid and yet people do that all the time people fall into the trap of these two questions all the time and people constantly think that they can tell God what to do that we can be his counselor that he should be guided by us and often that can manifest itself in the fact that often will people want we

want God to remove everything from our lives that we don't like and yet at the same time we want God to allow us to do all sorts of things that he doesn't like we expect God to give us blessings in other words without

at any point taking on responsibility so people think that we can kind of just have God in our terms other people think that we can repay God ourselves it's just another way of describing a kind of salvation by works the fact that our eternal security can be based on the fact that we've been pretty good people or that we've given enough payments to God we've got to realize that both of these actions describing these questions kind of dictating to God the terms of our relationship with him or thinking that we can pay God both of those mindsets are deadly you cannot tell God what to do he is God and so even most the most basic common sense tells us that our job is not to tell our job is to listen and likewise you can't pay God you can't bargain with him and and that's just again simple common sense tells you that when you think of the creator creation distinction you think about that God is infinite and we are tiny can't pay him anything and that's reminding us of an incredibly important point it's reminding us that God is not a barter often life comes down to bartering we think you know if you do this I'll do that you give me this I'll give you that we look for the best deal when we're buying things and you know we tried to get in there to make a good impression with colleagues or with people that we're going to be working with we want to impress people because it'll give us a sense of worth we try to use our powers of persuasion in order to get the stuff that we want and we can easily think that that you know when we come to God we have to kind of persuade him and convince him that you know he should listen to us and and that that we have to kind of persuade God to love us and save us but God is not a barter and this is so crucial and so wonderful because it means first of all that that God is never manipulated which means that you can never ever get the better of him and you know you never ever have to work your salvation as some kind of deal we cannot manipulate God we cannot persuade him but what makes it so amazing is that you don't have to that's the amazing truth of the gospel it's not about bartering it's far far better about that it's impossible for us to repay God it's impossible for us to manipulate God into saving us and we never have to because salvation is a gift salvation is a free gift it's not by works not by payment not by persuasion it's all by the free abundant grace of God and that's a crucial truth and time is marching on a crucial truth that we need to remember and even as Christians you know we can think to ourselves you know what yes I know I'm not saved by works and I know that salvation is by a gift but but in terms of our ongoing relationship with God it's so easy for us to think that you know that we kind of need to that we kind of need to earn God's affection and you know I won't ask you to raise your hands but you know if I was to ask you all you know do you think that God is absolutely delighted with you right now in your life and if I was to say you know put up your hands if you'd answer that question is no I think that I think that most of you would put your hands up maybe I'm wrong but I would put my hand up because we tend to think to yourself you know is God absolutely delighted with you right now in terms of your situation in life we tend to think no that's wrong the answer is yes it's always yes as Christians so often we think that we need to repay God to make up for the facts that we've mucked up in our lives that we need to repay God in order to make us actually like us and it's so easy to think that because we muck up every week God must be so fed up of us but but we're forgetting that God's affection for you is inexhaustibly deep and that means that that if you think about it God's affection for you God's love for you it's like an ocean so if you imagine you're going to God and you're standing by this deep ocean of God's love you don't say to him Lord can I please buy a bit of that ocean so I can take it home with me you don't do that you don't take a piece of the ocean away with you what do you do just jump in and that is what God's love is like you don't need to buy a piece of it you don't need to take away a piece of it you don't need to barter for it you don't need to earn it you just fall into it and as you fall into it you discover that it's inexhaustibly deep you just throw yourself in and you let his love and care wash all over you you don't have to earn God's affection it's already there it's inexhaustibly deep you don't have to persuade God by some genius like some genius counselor you don't need to repay him like some religiously rich person you just fall into that ocean of love that's inexhaustibly deep and the reason you can do that is revealed to us in the last verse which just goes through very very quickly I think I said this this morning I'll say it again tonight the the big words in scripture are wonderful but the little words are also wonderful Paul here is summing up the gospel is coming up God's plan of salvation and all that God has achieved her everything is centred on his son

[32 : 19] Jesus Christ and what God is doing through him and that's emphasized so clearly in this last verse where it says for from him and through him and to him are all things and these words are reminding us that when it comes to your salvation it's initiated by God it's from him you're a Christian because he came to get you he came looking for you he had a place for you that was empty and so he pursued you he started it he came for you he initiated it it's all accomplished through him all through what he has done every single weakness mistake regret that you have he has come and taken it on himself through Jesus he has paid the price he's taken our sin cancelled the debt he's died in our place he's finished the work it's all through him completely and it's all leading back to him it's from him through him and to him that's the great goal of the gospel God has come seeking after you he's come to get you he's accomplished everything needed for your salvation and his goal is to bring you back to him so that you can be his and be with him forever and that's why we can have total security because it depends entirely on him that's why we can gladly give him the glory forever because he does it we just benefit and it's just an amazing reminder of everything that God wants for you and everything that he's done for us and and bringing all these verses bringing these verses together you know you have just this this amazing description of the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God how unsearchable he is how inscrutable his ways nobody knows his mind nobody can be his counselor no one can pay him a gift everything's from him through him to him the glory belongs to him and all of that has been revealed in the gospel of

Jesus Christ and the whole point of that gospel is to save you the full depth of everything that God is and has done is revealed most clearly in everything that he's doing for you that is just so amazing tells you how special and precious you are it reminds us of how incredible God is in other words all of these all this depth of riches all this inscrutable stuff all this massive glory that belongs to him it isn't so that we can stand miles off and look at God and think oh wow isn't he amazing it's so that God can come and pick you up and hold you in his arms forever Amen. Let's pray. Father we bow before you and we marvel at the depth of your wisdom and your riches and your knowledge and we praise you that that all things are from you through you to you and we pray that that all glory would be to you forever we thank you for everything that you've done for us through your son our Lord Jesus please fill our minds with more and more of you please lead us in your ways this week and every week of our lives in Jesus name Amen.