

Sermon for Sunday, October 17, 2010
Dr. Dan Doriani
What is Your Glory?
Romans 11:33-36. Psalm 95

These are the glories of mankind: Nobel prizes, mansions, championships, title, the top rank in anything. It's wisdom, strength, riches. In these we glory. But Jeremiah says, "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight" (Jer. 9:24). Romans 11 impels us to ask "What is your glory?" For eleven chapters, Paul has presented his gospel: Humans need the gospel, because of sin. Jesus presents himself in the gospel, received by grace through faith. Paul offers the benefits of the gospel: peace with God and joy in affliction. Because we are united to Christ, we are members of his renewed people. We have substantial power over sin, and he forgives us when we falter. Paul adds a long, non-linear exploration of God's purposes in history. He explains that even if the gospel is often rejected, God will accomplish his purpose. "All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Then Paul pauses. He has climbed the mountain of God's work and surveys all he sees. He considers the meaning of his journey for himself and the men and women who share it. Yet first he looks up to praise God. His language is steeped in Old Testament Scripture, yet it is his own: "Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).

1. The Glory of God and the lesser glory of mankind

Glory of God in Scripture

The Bible directs us to the glory of the Lord again and again. After Moses leads Israel out of Egypt, Moses and the Israelites sing: "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you — majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?" (Exod. 15:11).

God manifests his glory when reveals his name, his character. He is "the compassionate and gracious God." He says "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy" (33:19, 34:6-7). Then he gives Israel a visible proof of his glory. A shining cloud hovers over their camp (16:10), then enters the tabernacle: "Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (40:34, cf. 2 Chron 7:1-3).

The Psalm 26 teaches Israel to sing God's glory. Why? Because God is the king of glory. Psalm 24 invites the city of Jerusalem to rise and glorify God: "Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle" (Psa. 24:7-8).

Psalm 29 commands Israel's worshipers to glorify the **holy God**: "Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness" (29:1-2). Then David takes us to God's mastery of creation. "The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders... over the mighty waters... The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory! (29:3, 9).

Psalm 8 says human glory is derived from God's glory. "O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set **your glory** above the heavens" (8:1). The psalm says we can share in God's glory: "What is man...?" You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor (8:5).

Let your mind wander: When the Bible says God crowns you "with glory," what do you think? It probably fits in Jeremiah's trio: wisdom, strength, and riches. Suppose you got a thoughtful compliment from a respected friend for your skill or way of life. There is glory in a genuine compliment. But it doesn't last long. Like all human glory, it's fleeting. And some of our glory is destructive – no real glory at all.

I recently talked to a long-time friend in another state. This year he became very ill with a combination of H1N1, Legionnaire's disease and pneumonia. A little later his wife suffered acute respiratory failure. Both came close to dying. Everyone assumed their illnesses were connected by virus or bacteria. No, diagnosis revealed that the link was exhaustion. Both the husband and the wife had pushed themselves for years. They had neglected to care for their bodies. They had ignored God's rhythms of work and rest. They were worn out, their compromise immune systems stopped functioning and opportunistic diseases had invaded.

Both believe in God. The man loves his work. It's good work, important work, and he did it well. His wife worked with him and both were, by all accounts, successful, admired, beloved. Yet my friend nearly worked himself to death and threatened to take his wife with him.

Physicians told both of them to get some rest, eat better, and exercise more. He thought, "When I exercise I feel guilty." His pastor spoke to him. He knew the man loved his wife dearly, more than he loved himself. He asked, "What is the first thing Jesus did for his bride, the church? He gave up his glory. He laid down his glory when he left heaven and took human flesh, so he could live with us."

The pastor continued: "So, what is your glory?" The man replied "My work." "Now if you love your wife, if you love your life together, you must leave your glory. Lay aside the glory you find in your work." My friend is trying to do that. He works less at night. He controls his schedule rather than letting his schedule control him. He is making progress because he loves his wife and knows he was wrong to find his glory in his work.

My friend isn't unique. So many people seek glory in work or relationships, and pursue that glory until it hurts them, even threatens to ruin them. But our glory can be healthy and lasting if it's united to God's glory.

The glory of Christ

The Christian finds his lasting glory with Jesus. Jesus has glory in himself, as he showed his disciples on the mountain, when he shone like the sun. John said, "We have seen his glory" (John 1:14). Yet we first see the glory of Jesus in his death and resurrection.

We find our greatest glory when we share in Jesus' life, his resurrection. Paul says this in Romans 8:17; "Now if we are children [of God], then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." Again, "He called you... through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14).

Union with Christ is the source of our glory. Paul says "Christ in you [is] the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). The glory of Jesus is also our motive, "The God of all grace... called you to his eternal glory in Christ" (1 Pet. 5:10).

How does it work? How do we find proper glory through our union w/ Christ? Some proverbs about glory offer a clue:

Proverbs 19:11 says, "A man's wisdom gives him patience; it is to his glory to overlook an offense." It is human nature to fly into a rage over an offense, to breathe out threats, even to seek revenge, especially if we're wronged personally. It's common and understandable, but our reaction to offenses can be worse than the offense itself.

Is that ever true of you? It's true of me sometimes, especially if I'm thinking about myself, my rights, my glory. Now Solomon says there is "a time for war," but he also says it's glory or splendor to pass over, pass by, forgive, an offense. We think we *keep* glory when we protect ourselves, but we gain glory when we overlook petty irritations and infringements on our rights.

I'm talking about home life. If I may stereotype, when the husband leaves the cap off the new toothpaste and it oozes all over the sink, wives, it is glory to overlook it. And husbands, it is your glory to overlook her failure to overlook your failure. To pass by an offense brings glory: "Better a patient man than a [mighty] warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city" (Proverbs 16:32). "Love covers all offenses.... But every fool is quick to quarrel" – and there is no glory in that (10:12, 20:3, ¹Waltke, Proverbs 2:105).

Now this may feel like a burden – one more law to keep, one more character defect to address. But if we trace it out, we realize that all these proverbs call us to God's character. He is "slow to anger... forgiving iniquity" Ex 34:6-7. He "does not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever" (Psalm 103:9). Therefore we find glory when our character becomes more like the character of God our father. And in a way, it's the easiest thing for someone to be like their Father.

Again, believers are united to Christ and his character. The children of God "share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory" (Romans 8:17). Through the gospel we "share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14).

Here is another proverb about human glory. "A large population is a king's glory," (Prov. 14:28). God has glory because he has a large population, on earth and in heaven. And if we are faithful to Christ, we will share in his glory, because he will put us in charge of many things (Matt. 25:23). So we have glory when we share God's glory.

One more, from Proverbs 20:29: "The glory of young men is their strength, and the majesty of the aged is their gray hair" (Waltke 2.159) Earlier, Solomon says they attain gray hair "by a righteous life" (Proverb 16:31). God is both wise and the Almighty, so young and old find glory when they share in his character. More: the Bible presents the generations not as rivals but as mutually dependent. They celebrate each other's glory. "The aged lay down the tracks along which immature youth, through their power, advance"². All this reminds us of the triune God, the way the Father, Son and Spirit glory in their unity of character and diversity of work. For the Father plans redemption, the Son achieves it, and the Spirit applies it.

2. The Glory of God in his character

The big idea in Romans 11:33-36 is this: There is no one like God. He is so deep, profound, and immense that words fail us. He is too deep for us and too far above us. We cannot trace his paths, cannot follow his thoughts, cannot comprehend his judgments. He says "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways" (Isa. 55:8).

God is always partially hidden (*deus absconditis*). Yet he tells enough about himself that we can catch a glimpse, and try for more. That is right. If we love biographies of great men, how much more should we want to study God's character.

¹ Waltke, Proverbs 2:105)

² Waltke, 2:166

Further, "No people ever rise higher than their idea of God"³. The gods of the Assyrians were cruel, and the Assyrians were cruel. The patron deity of Rome was Jupiter. He ruled over laws and social order and the Romans loved law and order. God says he loves justice and mercy and faithfulness and these are traits that Christians admire and aspire to show. So we explore traits of God.

God's riches 11:33-35

It is true that God is rich in the sense that we use the word "rich." In 11:35, Paul refers to this, asking, "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" Indeed, we cannot pay God with our works, because he chose and justified us apart from works. And we cannot pay God with our wealth, because our wealth came from him.

When David collected his wealth to fund the construction of the temple, he gave gold and silver by the ton. As he gave, he said, "Wealth and honor come from you... But who am I... to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand" (1 Chronicles 29:12-14).

But when Paul considers God's riches, he thinks first of the riches of his character – his wisdom, knowledge, and judgments (Romans 11:33) In Romans 2:4, Paul mentions the riches of God's character – his kindness, tolerance, patience and mercy (9:15). Because the "riches of his glory" are "inexhaustible," he shows mercy and love, even to those who were not his people (9:23-26, Eph. 2:4, 3:8). God "richly blesses all who call on him" (Romans 10:12). Salvation comes from the riches of God's **character** and it enriches all who receive it.

The riches of God's character make us rich. The world rejoiced at the rescue of thirty three Chilean minors this week. We recall that when the mine first collapsed, officials feared that everyone had perished. Then the word came that it might take 4 months till they could be rescued from their space 2,000 feet below ground. Everyone hoped they wouldn't die or go crazy first. But now, two months after the explosion, all thirty three miners emerged looking remarkably healthy. They kissed the ground, bounded into the arms of loved ones, embraced their president. Psychologists kept them steady, sharing things they had learned from astronauts who were confined in space stations. They ran in the mine to stay fit, they chose leaders, they communicated with loved ones. It was a breathtaking rescue that defied all odds and spared no effort. We thank God that the story ended with such success.

Great as their rescue is, it pales compared to Jesus' gospel rescue. He didn't dig a hole and send down a rescue capsule, after testing it for safety. He came all the way down to us and never left until he had died to accomplish our rescue.

Our condition was far worse. We weren't imprisoned by 2,000 feet of rock, we were dead in our sins, buried in "the damning dominion of darkness." (Scotty Smith's phrase) Worse, we had no interest in our deliverance, and were perfectly happy to bounce around in our dark, dank little caves. We were like insects buzzing on a warm October afternoon, unaware of December's deadly freeze.

But because of God's great love for us, because he is rich in mercy, he raised us to life when we were dead in our sins and united us to Christ's life by faith (Eph.2:1-6). The miners fell into the arms of their wives and children, we fall into the arms of God the Father. The miners saw cameras flash; if we listen we can hear the choirs of angels welcoming us into God's family. And we await a greater celebration, one we will see with our eyes, when the Lord Jesus comes again, at the resurrection of the just, whom he gathered from every age and nation!

God's wisdom and knowledge 11:33

³ (Boice, 1412)

God is great in every way: *He knows what is, he knows what should be, and he knows how to get from one to the other.* **He is great in what he thinks – his judgments. He is great in what he does – his paths. He is great in what he knows, and where he goes.** God's wisdom and knowledge is first what guides the purposes, especially the guidance of history and the redemption of his people, described in Romans 8-11.

But lets also state the essence: God knows everything and he uses his knowledge perfectly. He knows what he should do and how to do it. He sets the highest goals and the surest way to achieve them. He is wise in salvation – in justifying his people by grace, through faith. He is wise in bringing us to maturity by his word and by our trials

Luther once said "We are accustomed to admit freely that God is more powerful than we are, but not that he is wiser."⁴ Indeed, we readily question God's wisdom. In the 1950s, a movement aimed to translate the Bible into every language. Their history is glorious, but agonizing: A man worked for a year, then lost all his notes in a sudden flood. After a long search, a woman found an indigenous translator who knew her rare native language and Spanish. Soon after the work began, she was murdered. The man and woman who suffered these losses eventually married, but he was murdered by the people they were trying to reach.⁵ What is the sense, the wisdom, of that? How can God let that happen? We think "If I were in charge, I would never let such things happen," that is, "I am wiser than God."

God's unsearchable judgments and inscrutable ways

We admit, Paul says, that God's wisdom is unsearchable (Romans 11:33). We cannot **fully fathom** them. But as 11:34, who can call himself God's counselor? His paths, his actions, what he does and where he goes, are also beyond us. Think of Paul himself: The great apostle was imprisoned over and over – once languishing for two years without a trial, on false charges. All he had to do to get out was pay a bribe, but he refused. What a waste! Yet Paul wrote four of his epistles while in jail: Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon. It was a good deal.

But of all the events that look absurd – and there are so many – none could surpass the death of Jesus – so good, so strong, so bold, loving and wise. So young. Yet this most tragic death is the best death, the best event – with the resurrection – of all time. God's ways are unsearchable, his paths untraceable, As Solomon says "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter" (Proverbs 25:2). If he does not explain, we will never know

We share Paul's exclamations and mean them as praise. "How unsearchable his judgments! (11:33). We approve the questions in 11:34-35: "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" Answer: "We cannot counsel God, he counsels us. We cannot give gifts to God, He gives gifts to us. We can never put him in our debt." We cannot plausibly say, "God, if I were you... It will be best if you." Any attempt to help God is to dethrone God and to enthrone ourselves.

The significance of God's wisdom and knowledge

First, God's wisdom **humbles** us. We don't know as much as we think, surely not more than God. At the end of his ordeal, Job apologizes for his rash speeches, when he says, "Sure I spoke things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. Therefore I repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3, 6). So let's be humble.

⁴ What Luther Says, Anthology 3:1453 plass 1959

⁵ Boice 1441-2.

Second, God's wisdom and knowledge comforts us. Disease, accidents, death seem so nonsensical to us. But the Lord sees, he knows. This summer I met a man who told me how he came to start a media company that now does billions in business annually. His story: I was one of three young managers brought in to turn around a faltering independent TV station around 1980. We were hungry and talented. Within two years, it moved from brink of failure to solid profit. The boss brought us all in. We expected a pat on the back and a nice bonus. Instead, "Thanks boys. You showed me how to run a TV station profitably. Now that I see how you did, I won't need you any more. You're all fired.' Best thing that ever happened to me." Rarely are things so clear to us, but we should believe they are clear to the Lord.

Third, let's be sure to claim what we can know from Scripture. We can't fully grasp God's paths, but he does explain some of them. The issue is not total lack of comprehension. "Man and animal eye each other over an abyss of mutual incomprehension." Fish, butterflies, and spider can't understand us at all. Dogs and horses seem to understand more. We're short of perfection, but ahead of dogs. God speaks and we heard him. Not perfectly, perhaps like a conversation between two people from two cultures. We miss some things, but not everything. And the more we try, the more we know.

3. Giving God glory

Paul ends with praise. "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever" (11:36). We should give glory to God because all things are *from God*, since he created them. All are *through* him since he sustains and rules all. And all are *to* him, for he is the Goal of all things."⁶ Knowing this, we can live faithfully and fearlessly, doing what lies before us to do, as God calls us to it, and leave the results to him.

I recently received a thoughtful "thank you for your book" note from a stranger who capped his note by quoting a few lines from it. It was gratifying because he was quoting from the most important sentences in the most important section of the book. It was also gratifying because I often write from a sort of internal compulsion. When I am alone in a quiet place, ideas sometimes pour out of me and, when written, it can eventually lead to a book. But I write at night, isolated from the world, lobbing words into the void, hoping some will land and do some good. In that sense, I my writing "to him." Your work is the same. We plant crops, tend businesses, care for children "to him."

Because he creates, sustains, and directs all things, God is worthy of our worship and adoration. Sadly, humans tend to be foolish as we choose whom we will admire or praise. We adore powerful politicians and military leaders, entertainers and athletes, but they fail us every last time. God is the only one who will not fail us, so we praise him. We worship God with songs and prayers, alone and together. We do it in church, and we can – should – do it in all of life, every breath we take.

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

⁶ Cranfield 2:591