



Glory to God!

Romans 16:25-27

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If you have your Bibles with you, I would invite you once again, now for the last time, to turn to the book of Romans, specifically chapter 16. Our text this morning is the last section of the epistle of Paul to the church at Rome: chapter 16, verses 25-27. So, after 20 months and 72 sermons, we have reached the end. Maybe this will be encouraging for you. I was reading a commentator this week, and in his commentary, which is based on his own sermons, was that the time he had spent in Romans was the best eight years he had in his congregation. So we have been moving at a lightning pace through the book of Romans.

Please give attention to the reading of God's Word. For the Word of the Lord is completely sufficient, the Word of the Lord is completely authoritative, and the Word of the Lord is completely inerrant. Romans 16, beginning at verse 25:

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Heavenly Father, we come to you this morning, and we ask, O Lord, that you would bless us, that you would bless us with your Word, that as we read your Word and hear it expounded we would be struck with the Lord Jesus Christ, that we would seek after him. Lord, we long to be with the Lord Jesus, and we long to know the glory that comes to your people. So we ask this morning that you would fill our hearts with a love for the Savior. We ask this in Christ's precious name, amen.

As I've said, we have spent a good deal of time in the book of Romans. We have spent not quite two years, but 72 sermons expounding God's Word, and what we've seen is that Paul's masterful letter sets forth so much truth about the gospel, grace, faith, and salvation, but now at the end of his letter Paul reminds the Romans and us why he wrote it.

It's not for us to study in isolation and to learn more *about* God. No, it is to bring us face-to-face with the God who saves us so we can understand the greatness of God's grace and to bring that grace to the nations so this great God would be worshiped over all the earth. The gospel is most wonderful not because it saves us. The gospel is most wonderful because it brings glory to God. Paul wants us to lift our eyes away from ourselves and set them on God, to give glory to God.

So this morning, I would like us to see three things from this last text. First, Paul calls us to *give glory to the powerful God*; then Paul calls us to *give glory to the wise God*; and finally, Paul calls us to *give glory to God through Jesus Christ*. Glory to the powerful God, glory to the wise God, and glory to God through Christ.

Glory to the Powerful God

Let's begin by looking at the call to give glory to God who is powerful. We have said before that this letter is a unique letter for Paul. It is a lengthy exposition of the gospel. It is twice as long or more than every other letter of Paul with the only exception of 1 Corinthians. In this letter, Paul gives us systematic teaching about sin, faith, justification, sanctification, the Holy Spirit, and the Christian life. This is the book that Christians go to to find proof texts for Christian teaching and to answer controversial questions.

Now Paul ends this book with a doxology, with a hymn of praise, as it were, to the glory of God, and that is unusual for Paul, because typically, Paul ends his letters with a benediction. You will remember what a benediction is. We looked at this last week. It is saying a good word. It is *us*-ward. We might put it that way. It is a blessing that comes to God's people. A doxology is *God*-ward. It points us to the glory of God. It is God's people giving glory to God.

The difference between ending a letter with a doxology as opposed to a benediction has caused some controversy over the centuries. Some scholars have used it to doubt whether Paul even wrote this doxology or that somehow it ended up in the wrong spot in the letter, that it should be at the end of chapter 14 and the benediction here in chapter 16 that we see in verse 20, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," should be the end of the letter.

Now, why is it that they say this? Well, it's simple. They say it's different from what Paul has done in other letters. End of story. So it can't be genuine. They act as if Paul has to do the exact same thing every time he writes a letter. It would be far better, I think, for us, rather than to doubt the Bible, to try to see this and see why Paul would vary from his normal pattern of a benediction. Why would he end this letter with a doxology?

I think what we will see is that Paul wants you to understand the gospel, and the only way you can understand the gospel is to understand the greatness of God. Understanding the gospel then also leads you to praise God, so it is practical at the same time that it is aspirational, something we seek for, we long for. Often, these two concepts, being practical and being aspirational, are set at odds against each other. Think about it *this* way. We long for something, but then we realize it would not be practical.

You might think about it like the design of a home. You think about things that would be wonderful to have in your home and how you would design it, and then before it can be built, you say to yourself, "But this just wouldn't be practical at all." Or think about it *this* way. Think about the elements of a wedding. We think about things that would stir our hearts and would cause people to weep and to see the majesty of a wedding, but that doesn't mean they can be included in a wedding.

My favorite example of this was given to me by a seasoned minister. He said that at a wedding the bride and the mother of the bride had decided it would be wondrous if at the conclusion of the wedding dozens of live doves were released *in* the sanctuary. That's just not practical by any stretch, is it? No. It might be something that we

would say, "Oh, that's a beautiful sight." Let me tell you, *you* can catch the birds afterward and clean up after them. It's not going to happen.

We might think about it when we think about enrolling in a certain school. We have a desire to go to a certain college. We think about the dorms, and we think about the student halls, and we think about the athletic programs, and we think about the library, and we think about the grounds, and then we realize this particular school isn't very effective at the major we want to study. It's not practical for us to go there, so we have to go somewhere else.

That's how life is, but not so with God. When we look to God and our hearts are filled with majesty and awe, we also understand that it is by looking to God that we are most practically helped and established. That's what Paul does here. He points you to the one who is able in verse 25. This is a reminder of the power and ability of God.

The word points us to the capability of God. It is not just a generic *can*. It means God possesses the capacity for doing what Paul is about to describe. It is a verb that relates to power, to might, to strength, to force. Don't just think about it as the difference between *can* and *may*. Think about it as the power God has that is power to work in your life. So, what does God in his power *do*?

First, Paul tells us he *strengthens* us. "Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ..." Again, Paul uses an interesting word here. He says God will *strengthen* us, and this word means to establish, to fix, to confirm, to support. It is interesting that this idea forms a bookend with the very beginning of the letter. All the way back in chapter 1, verse 11, you may recall that Paul wanted to impart a spiritual gift to the Romans.

He said, "I long to come to you and to impart a spiritual gift so that you would be strengthened." Same word. It's as if Paul is saying that he would strengthen them by pointing them to the God who is really the one who strengthens. This is actually a good summary of the letter, because God *is* the God who strengthens. He is the one who justifies. How does he do this? How does he strengthen us? Paul tells us: through the gospel, according to the gospel.

Paul has been telling you over and over again that the gospel frees you from sin. The gospel establishes you in a relationship with God, and it strengthens you by making you more and more like Jesus. We have to understand the gospel is not just some *thing* that comes to you. It is the work of the great and glorious God who makes you his own and who establishes and empowers you. Never forget that. The gospel is the power of God. That's actually where Paul started in chapter 1, verse 16.

Do you notice how Paul refers to the gospel here in verse 25? He calls it "*my* gospel." That doesn't mean this is Paul's idea of the gospel that's somehow different from John's gospel or Matthew's gospel or someone else's gospel. No. What he means is the gospel God has given is Paul's gospel. Paul needs it as much as anyone else does. He has taken it to himself. That's what strengthens Paul. That's what establishes Paul. So he possesses it. He says, "It's *my* gospel. You can't take it away from me. I need it."

You need to remember that it is foolish to look anywhere for strength other than the gospel. We need this reminder, because the world is constantly pointing you everywhere else. It provides false hope to you. The only hope you have today is to believe and trust the gospel, that Jesus Christ, God himself, came to earth and became a man so he could die for your sins. That is how you can have hope. Do you believe the gospel? Do you have this strength? Or are you still wavering, unsure? Look to the one who is able to strengthen you: the glorious God.

The second thing God is able to do is to *command faith*. That sounds odd, doesn't it? When we think of faith, we often think of the opposite of commanding. Faith is not doing, but it is rather believing. That is true, but faith is not optional. It is not a suggestion from God. The gospel comes from God, and it comes as a command for us to obey. We obey by believing the gospel.

Now, to understand that, think about the gospel for a moment. What *is* the gospel? Paul has been explaining this for some time, but the gospel is summarized in chapter 1, verse 16, as "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes." As Paul has been telling us, it is the only way of salvation, the only way to be right with God, the only way to receive eternal life. There is no other way other than the gospel.

That's another problem we face today. If the world cannot convince you to look away from the gospel entirely, it will try to convince you to see the gospel as something optional, something you can take or leave at your whim, but that is not what the Bible says. That's not what changed Paul's life. It's not what Paul points us to here. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation, and this gospel is the preaching of Jesus Christ, Paul says in verse 25.

When Paul writes this, he means more than the act of telling people about the gospel. When he talks about the preaching of Jesus Christ, he's referring not just to the act of sharing the gospel, but he's talking about the message of the gospel itself...who Jesus is, what Jesus has done. So God is glorious in Jesus Christ. It is through Jesus Christ that we see God's glory.

This is what Jesus prayed for in his High Priestly Prayer. He prayed that his people would see the glory of God in the glory that God had given to Christ in his gospel mission. We see God's glory in Jesus. So when you hear about the gospel, when you hear about Jesus, you are seeing the glory of God. No one could do that but God. Only God can bring the gospel to you. Only God can transfer you from death to life. The gospel is preaching Jesus Christ.

This gospel, Paul says, has been revealed in Jesus Christ. He says it is "according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God." That's why Paul uses this phrase "according to the revelation of the mystery." It is revealed in Jesus Christ. The full extent of the gospel had been a mystery up until the coming of Christ.

Do you remember what a mystery means in the Bible, when Paul uses this word *mystery*? It's not like how we normally use the word *mystery*. It doesn't mean something that is unknowable. It doesn't mean something that is completely unknown. What it means is something that has not yet been fully revealed. It has been kept secret, or we might even better translate it "kept quiet." It hasn't been shouted for long ages, but now, Paul says, it has been disclosed. It has been revealed. It has been made manifest.

Well, *how* has it been made manifest? Paul tells us. It has been made manifest in the past through the prophetic writings. It is found in the Old Testament. You can think about all of the places in the Old Testament where God revealed his plan of salvation and the one who would bring salvation: in Genesis, where he reveals the seed of the woman who would crush the Serpent; the seed of Abraham who would bless the nations; the prophet who is greater than Moses; David's son who is David's Lord; the suffering servant of Isaiah; the one who would come out of Bethlehem in Judea.

All of them point to Jesus Christ. All of them find their consummation, their full revelation in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's not that they were hidden and impossible to find in the Old Testament. It is that once Jesus has come and been manifested, all of them fall into place. Have you ever had opportunity to look at one of these posters or paintings that is intentionally blurry and you can't make anything out in the picture? The secret of it is that you are supposed to fix your focus on one particular point in the poster or the painting, and when you do that, everything in there is revealed. You can all of a sudden see things.

That's what it's like with Jesus. By focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ, we see that God's plan has been from before time began, from before the coming of sin, that he provided it upon the fall, that he told the people of Israel, that he gathered them together, that he revealed he would send his Son to redeem them. When Jesus comes, he brings the gospel to us. This is what Paul means when he talks about the obedience of faith. Jesus comes to bring about the obedience of faith.

When you believe in Jesus, you are being obedient to the command of the gospel. You are answering God's call to abandon yourself, to abandon your works, and to run to Jesus for safety and life. There is no other way. It is only by believing in Jesus and trusting that he died for you and for your sins that you can have life and hope. Will you obey this gospel call today?

If you are sitting here today and have not trusted Jesus, it is likely because you think there's still time, there's no rush. "Why be rash?" you might say. "Why jump to conclusions?" But that is not true. The command to believe on Jesus comes to you *today*, right now. It comes from God. Won't you trust Jesus right now? He will never cast you out. You will be saved and strengthened by a glorious God.

Glory to the Wise God

The second way Paul gives glory to God is for his wisdom. God is glorious, and he is glorious because he is powerful, but he is also glorious, Paul tells us, because he is wise. Look with me at verse 27. "...to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ!" In fact, God's wisdom is so great that Paul describes God as being *only* wise. There is no one like God.

There is none who can solve the problem of sin and death. God's wisdom is so great he resolves the greatest problem in the universe in a way that reveals his glory. So, where do we see God's wisdom? We see it in the cross. Now, the cross is an emblem of weakness. It was an instrument of a shameful death. It was reserved for the worst of criminals, ones Rome wanted to embarrass publicly and to show as being weak.

Perhaps the greatest example of this was the end of Spartacus and his rebel gladiators. Some of you know the story of how Spartacus rebelled against Rome and all her might and gathered together a force of gladiators to fight injustice, but we often don't remember the end of that story. As Spartacus gathered together his gladiators, Rome gathered an army, and the army came and defeated Spartacus and his gladiators.

It is reported that all the way for miles along the road to Rome these gladiators were crucified on either side of the road. Why? Because Rome wanted to make clear that it would not brook rebellion, that to rebel against Rome would be to fail, to be embarrassed, to be shamed, to die a shameful death. That's what the cross is, but in the cross of Jesus Christ, we see that God has brought salvation to sinners like you and me.

We've seen this over and over again in this book of Romans. There is a conundrum Paul describes that God faces. Now, *conundrum* is a great word, but let me let you know what it means. It means a really hard problem, an almost unsolvable problem. That conundrum God had was... How can God remain just and yet justify sinners? How can he forgive sinners for their sin yet remain honest and have integrity and stand for justice? The answer is he does this in the cross. His justice is paid for perfectly and maintained.

Jesus paid the penalty for sin. Jesus drank the cup of God's wrath to the last drop. At the same time, the cross is the display of the Lord's overwhelming grace, mercy, and love, because our sins were nailed to that cross. We escaped the punishment we are due for our sins in the cross of Jesus Christ. There is no way we could improve on the cross. Only the cross completely redeems. Only *it* completely answers the power of sin. Only *it* does away with human pride and working.

Do you see the wisdom of God in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem sinners? If you do, does it move you to glorify God for what he has done? Do you praise the Lord for his perfect wisdom that has brought about the solution for your sin? Oh, that we would see the glorious wisdom of God and that we would share it with everyone we know.

That brings us to a related point. If you see the wisdom of God put on display in the plan of salvation, then you will see God's wisdom in your own life. Remember that this letter, like all of Paul's, is divided into two parts...not *equal* parts but two parts. In the first part, we see the work of God in redeeming us. We read about the great salvation that comes to us from the work of Jesus on the cross, but the wisdom of God does not end there. There is more.

The second part of this letter is the work of God in the lives of his people, you and me, once we have been saved. God does not leave us to ourselves after he saves us. Remember that he calls you to be transformed, to be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. So do not ever limit God. Our tendency, if we are honest with ourselves, is to try to find the spot where we can pick up for God. We say to ourselves, "God, I really needed you to save me. I really needed you to do away with the guilt of my sin, but now I've got this. I can handle this. I'll take it from here." That's our attitude too often.

Can you take it from here? Really? Can you handle life and all that it brings? If you can, you're a better person than I am, but the truth is you *can't* handle all that life will bring to you. Life is incredibly hard. We have trials. We have

tribulations. We have discouragements. We have hardships. We have broken relationships. We have health problems. We have financial problems.

Where do you go when the darkness comes? Where do you go when the lights go off and you don't even know where to find the switch, when you are in trouble and know you can't solve it by yourself? Where you go is to the Lord. You trust his wisdom. He hasn't gotten any less wise. You find confidence and assurance not from perfect circumstances, nor from your skill or your ability, but from the wisdom of God. The one who can save you can keep you. The one who has redeemed you is making you more and more like Jesus. Trust the wisdom of God each and every day, and give *him* the glory.

Glory to God Through Christ

This brings us to a final brief point. Not that it's unimportant (actually, the opposite) but that it is a brief summary of what Paul has been telling us all along. How do we bring glory to God? How are we able to do this? We have seen that we are to give God glory for his power and for his wisdom, but how do we even know about that? Paul reminds us that we only know about the glory of God and his glorious work through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is our mediator. That means he brings us to God. He reveals God to us. That's why Paul says in verse 27 that we are to bring glory forevermore to God through Jesus Christ. Do you remember that scene in the gospel of John when Jesus is in the upper room with his disciples? It's in chapter 14 of John's gospel. He tells his disciples that they are safe, that he has prepared a place for them, and he tells them in verse 6 that he is the only way to the Father. He is *the* way.

Philip responds by asking him, "Lord, we want to know the Father. We want to see the Father. Show us the Father, would you?" How does Jesus respond? Do you recall, Jesus responds, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus is the one who shows us God. Jesus reveals to us the glory of God. We see this over and over again in this letter. Do you want to know that God has saved you? Do you want to have a relationship with God? Then look to Jesus.

You remember in chapter 5 Paul talks about how grace conquers sin and leads to eternal life. How does that chapter end? How does this grace come to us? It comes through Jesus Christ our Lord. In chapter 6, we see that we were once slaves to sin and that the wages of sin was death, but now we are freed by the free gift of God. How does that free gift of God come to us? It comes in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In chapter 7, we read about the remaining sin in our lives and how it must be killed. How can we be delivered from such sin? Through Christ our Lord. Over and over again, we are reminded that Jesus is the one who brings us to God. We see the glory of God through Jesus. That's where Paul points you to again, right now in verse 27. To God be glory through Jesus. Not just *now*. Do you see it? *Forevermore*.

Beloved, you will never reach the place where you do not need Jesus. Jesus is not only *all* you need; you need him all the time. How could we possibly think we could reach a place in the Christian life where we could go out on our own and we don't need Jesus, when Paul tells us when we are glorified and in the presence of God, without

any sin, we still need Jesus forevermore, because Jesus reveals to us the glory of God? You will never know peace or hope or salvation outside of Christ.

Now, one final point. God is indeed worthy of glory, but God is also the *only* one worthy of glory. We must rid ourselves of this notion that the Lord is just one option among many. That's often what you'll hear today. "Well, that might be true for *you*, but it's not true for *me*." Or maybe you've heard it like this: "Who are you to be so intolerant as to think there's only one way to God and to life?"

Well, Paul tells us it is to God alone that we give glory. Again, he is summarizing what he has been telling us in this letter. He has told us that man has exchanged the glory of God for idols, for animals, for nature, even for man himself, in chapter 1, and that as a result, all have fallen short of the glory of God, in chapter 3. But it is through Jesus Christ that we see once again our hope in the glory of God. That is where our hope is found.

Apart from God, no one is worthy, no one has glory, no one does any good, but when we look to God, we see an inexhaustible source of glory. All that God is and all that God does is glorious, and the chief expression of that glory is found in the gospel. The gospel comes to us *from* a glorious God, it brings us *to* that glorious God, and it does all of this *for* the glory of God.

In conclusion, that is our hope...our hope of salvation, of life, of freedom from sin. Our hope is found in God's glory. God has done all that he has promised. He has sent his Son. He is redeeming sinners. He sent his Spirit to make the redeemed more and more like Christ. Will you live today for the glory of God? It starts with obeying the call of the gospel to put your faith in Jesus Christ as the Savior of sinners.

If you have not, I call you to do that today. But it doesn't end there. You trust Jesus to bring you all the way to God, to show you the glory of God now and forevermore. Do you believe that? If you do, then I ask you to end Romans with me as Paul shows us. Add your "amen" to Paul. You know what *amen* means, don't you? "It is true. Let it be so." Lord Jesus, help us to glorify God with all that we are. Amen? Amen!