

Sermon prepared for Grace Church December 27, 2015. Jonathan Shradar

Record numbers of people traveled this last week to celebrate Christmas with family and friends and take a break from school and work for much needed rest. Fascinating in this record, is that more people than ever have driven to their destination. In an age of rapid, even though exacerbating, air travel, people have instead hit the road, taking the long way round.

As I heard this news I was nostalgic for my childhood and the many long road trips that were our vacations. I have such fond memories of sitting in my parents back seat heading off on an adventure. The journey was exciting, and it often took a long time. And then I would have a sense of celebration at the destination - to reach the place we had been traveling to for days and hours...

Maybe we can see our study of Romans in a similar light. It has been a long journey traversing miles of Scripture in months... and it has been such an enjoyable journey - the sights we have seen, the encounters we have had along the way. And here, today we reach the conclusion, the destination. This is where Romans brings us, to worship.

Paul, most likely in his own hand, pens a final doxology reminiscent of all that has come before and shares his response to the subject of the letter... And his worship, his words of praise declare that:

God establishes his people as the secret of his work and wisdom are revealed for his glory.

Romans 16:25-27

All of Romans lands here. In worship.

Romans 1:1-6 “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, [2] which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, [3] concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh [4] and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, [5] through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, [6] including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,”

To glory forevermore.

It would not be hyperbole to suggest that Romans is the most closely reasoned and compelling book of the New Testament. “Its massive theology, so ably argued in the first eleven chapters, logically proceeds from the statement of the gospel in the opening verses of chapter 1 to the need

for the gospel because of man's sin in chapters 1-3. Next it describes the provision of the righteousness that comes by faith in chapters 3, 4.

Then our position in Christ is beautifully described in chapter 5. The secret spiritual victory is mapped out in chapters 6, 7 and oh so powerfully in 8. "And finally in chapters 9 through 11, a vindication of God's work in history." Then Paul's foundational theology gives way to an appropriately rousing doxology in **11:36** "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen." There is nothing like the first 11 chapters of Romans.

Then comes the compelling call to practical Christian living in chapter 12-15, beginning with an invitation to present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God. We are encouraged to practice our theology by using our gifts to serve one another in love. To subject ourselves to authorities over us, to care for the weaker brother with humility and live for Christ's glory with a gospeled heart.

And it ends when the recounting of all this gloriously good news should end, in praise and worship of the God who has called us to belong to Jesus. And not as if we need more fuel for passionate worship, Paul in this doxology reminds us why we worship as he gives praise for God's Work and praise for God's Wisdom.

God establishes his people as the secret of his work and wisdom are revealed for his glory.

1) Praise for God's Work

Romans 16:25-26 "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 [26] 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—"

This is God's work for us, work deserving praise and glory. His work is everything that had been laid before us in the letter. When we were still sinners, God in love comes to save us. That he gives the Spirit to awaken and empower us and there is nothing that can separate us from his love.

And all of it is summed up in being "established" (in the Greek) or strengthened by God. God establishes his people in salvation. This is his glorious work.

Now, when you think of established... Maybe you have used it in the context of stability in life. "I just need a little help until I get established... the business will profit once it's established..." So there is this point where we are secure and then the real work comes in and we attempt success...

But here this establishment is very much a strengthening... This is God putting you on solid footing and building you up. This is God bringing you all the way home.

No longer left to your own devices or ability to meet the perfect requirements of the law... no longer adrift without purpose in life when you are called to Christ. This is God saving you and flourishing you... Some days this thriving seems so far away. But because of the finished work of Jesus on the cross for you, we know the promise will be fulfilled.

Philippians 1:6 “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

And this establishing, strengthening and completion don't happen in a heavenly laboratory out of sight... This work is done “according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.”

By Knowing Jesus, we are strengthened.

When Paul here says “my gospel” we don't need to freak out like he has his own brand of good news... but instead this is the One true gospel of Christ, and it has so transformed Paul that he owns it and proclaims it.

It is at the preaching of Jesus, according to the good news of the cross, that Christians can stand, are bolstered in the midst of life.

“Jesus is the exegesis, the explanation of the Godhead. Therefore our knowledge of Jesus is the key to knowing God and to standing and being established.”

And oh what a God he is to know! His grace, his love, unfading love for you! In knowing him, in being reminded over and over (because we are forgetful) of his redeeming work we have the strength to get through the day.

Not long ago, maybe you remember, I was on a quest to figure out a lack of energy... Nothing drastic, I just noticed in my afternoons I hit this wall. So I thought, maybe I am gluten intolerant and cut gluten out of my diet for three weeks. I was waiting for the breakthrough of the new diet and was being, mostly faithful, to the plan.

Then one afternoon I went for a run. I had the music blaring, some sick beats to motivate me to kick fast! I can remember being so hopeful, that I would achieve a runner's high and the stress of the day would melt away... Then, maybe a mile into the run, instead of a runner's high, I experienced a runner's death. I have never felt so weak. It was as if all of the force had been drained out of me...

So I walked the rest of the way, the awesome music did nothing for me, my mental games to push myself didn't budge my lack of fuel. So the first things I did when I got home was carbo load!

This is our spiritual life according to Paul. Sadly, too many people that proclaim faith in Jesus have cut him out of their diet. They have restrictive motivational diets, or pyramid schemes that only deliver death. But the race that we are called to run is meant to be fed a steady and constant diet of Jesus, his work, his gospel.

“The key to standing is making Jesus the center of everything... The story of Jesus should be our constant meditation.”

Our strength is according to knowing Jesus. This is how God works...

“according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages [26] 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—”

This has been the plan all along and it is now revealed in Jesus... revealed to all people. God's establishing his people in salvation is ancient... it is not as if he is in crisis mode trying to figure out a solution, but he providentially purposed it all to unfold for his glory.

This week at a Bible study as we read Genesis, I wondered what it was like for Moses to write details to stories that he had no idea would point to Christ. This is the prophets laboring and studying the things of Christ but not knowing that they were doing so to benefit us.

This is the secret made known. Mysterion.

This does not mean mysterious (as the English would suggest) but instead a secret that was once kept dark but is now revealed. Here in Romans a great and ancient secret has been thrown wide open to believers by the work of the Holy Spirit.

It is a work that as 1 Corinthians says, men could not have imagined, “The truth that the Son of God would come from heaven to live and die for us and that we enter into salvation only by faith in him is not obvious and could be known by us only when and as God revealed it.” Morris, L.

And he has, for our good and his glory! The gospel is revealed truth, not human wisdom.

Ephesians 1:4-10 “In love [5] he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, [6] to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. [7] In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, [8] which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight [9] making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he

set forth in Christ [10] as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.”

In this “mystery, which is Christ,” God has given Jesus to us through the virgin birth, through his absolutely perfect earthly life, through his vicarious death for us, through his breaking the bonds of death and ascending to the right hand of the Father. Thus the mysterion has been opened to us. “We cannot understand everything, for even in eternity the wonder of it will continue to unfold. Yet now, in time, we understand what was in ages past darkly veiled.

“The veil is rent, the shadows of the evening are done away, and life and immortality are brought to light by the gospel, and the Sun of righteousness has risen upon the world.” *Matthew Henry*

Colossians 1:26-28 “the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. [27] To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. [28] Him we proclaim,..”

What a miraculous mystery this is! That God, in his love, would come as a babe, to forgive the world of sin, to call us children, to keep us.

Our theology must become doxology!

If it is up to you then sure worship yourself... the truth revealed in Christ is that it is his work, through and through, from beginning to end... so it is him we worship!

“When Jesus is the subject of our proclamation, our conversation, our meditation, we stand! And as we live and grow in Jesus, the mysterion opens wider and wider, and we become more firmly established. The unfolding mystery of God Incarnate assaults our souls and draws us up to glory.”

Praise God for his work!

The doxology in Romans also praised God for his wisdom.

2) Praise for God’s Wisdom

Romans 16:27 “to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

This is worship because of who God is. Clearly a powerful God. The One able to strengthen us, to claim us and build us, to keep us. And also, the only wise God.

Wisdom that draws us to admire and trust in him.

“God is infinitely wise... Wisdom is knowing what the greatest goal is in any situation, and what the best way is to achieve it. It’s different from knowledge, but it assumes knowledge. They overlap. You can’t exercise wisdom without knowledge; because in order to figure out the best way to achieve a goal, you have to have knowledge of many factors. On the other hand, you can have a lot of knowledge and not have wisdom. There are many brilliant fools. And many less-educated sages.”

“But we are talking about God’s wisdom, not ours. The difference is that he always knows the best goal in every situation, and he always has total and perfect knowledge of billions and billions of relevant factors in every situation that enable him to know the best way to achieve the goal.” Piper

His wisdom is infinite... we can’t wrap our minds around the depths of his wisdom and even in attempts to grasp it we are left in awe. I don’t know what your view of God is... and I realize some people have a small view of God... But this only God of the Bible is all sovereign, all powerful, all knowing, all wise.

He only is perfectly and infallibly wise; he only is originally wise, in and of himself; for he is the spring and fountain of all the wisdom.

If we think the mysterion is mind blowing... attempt to contemplate the wisdom of God. This creative genius who has planned salvation throughout history in this way. Who has determined all things. Who has chosen to love you.

See how his wisdom is known in the work of Christ:

1 Corinthians 1:21-31 “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, [God wisely rejects salvation by human effort, intellect and wisdom] it pleased God through the folly of what we preach(1) to save those who believe. [In the eyes of the world God’s way of salvation is foolish] [22] For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, [23] but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, [24] but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [In his infinite wisdom God chose a way of salvation through Christ that crumbles Jewish demands for signs and Gentile demands for human wisdom... In his wisdom he chose to save sinners through the human foolishness of a crucified Messiah. This Christ is the most foolish-looking moment in the wisdom of God] [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. [The foolishness of God is wiser than men... God expresses his wisdom in the form of human foolishness and weakness. Why?]

[26] For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards,(2) not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. [27] But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; [28] God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to

nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being(3) might boast in the presence of God. [The wise way of salvation in the death of Christ is rooted in the infinitely wise way of choosing sinners before the cross and the wise way of calling sinners after the cross. God chose us, purchased us, and called us in a way that would strip us of every ground of boasting in ourselves.] [30] And because of him(4) you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Because of the wisdom of God in salvation and beyond... we boast in him... we worship him.

“This is the greatest goal of salvation. This is what infinite wisdom was aiming at. “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” God has chosen us, purchased us, called us, and done everything else involved in our salvation, from eternity to eternity, with perfect wisdom—that is, in such a way as to strip us of all boasting before God in ourselves, and replace it with boasting only in the Lord.” Piper

Admiration - awe and worship.

This is the place of **trust** for us. To know that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is the only place, source and true holder of wisdom. Because we have seen this wisdom play out in the forgiveness of sin and in his work for us, we can lean into it for all of life. To follow his commands. To rely on his providence. To rest in his plan. And to worship him for it.

We can praise God for having it all figured out... and in that figuring... that he chose to love you.

God establishes his people as the secret of his work and wisdom are revealed for his glory.

The bold reminders of God’s work and his wisdom through this letter to the Romans church, and to us, arrives at its destination, the worship, the glorifying of God.

“To him... be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.”

“To this God is ascribed glory forever through Jesus Christ. There is no cessation of his glory: it is forever. And the Christian knows that glory is to be ascribed to God on the basis of what Christ has done. It is that that enables us to see what a glorious God this God is.” And Praise becomes our constant occupation and preoccupation.

At the thorough proclamation of Jesus in Romans, do you find yourself at the same place as Paul? Does your heart cry “glory forevermore?”

How might we **Respond**?

Are you **established**? Repent and believe. Turn from your attempts at outwitting God, of coming up with a better plan. Believe in his work, that Jesus came in your place to live and die and to forgive you. Have faith in him. Then rejoice! Hear the truth revealed and proclaimed over you.

“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ...If God is for us, who can be against us?.. I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Christian: **Marinate in the Mysterion!** Come to the well of refreshment, nourishment, the work of Christ... soak in it. Hear it, proclaim it, at every opportunity. And then let it do its work in your heart, and worship.

Declare it in song, in praise, in a life of worship to the only wise God. Response is really to join in!

God establishes his people as the secret of his work and wisdom are revealed for his glory.

This is the season of celebration... for believers and those yet to believe the same. Christmas and New Years... but what a difference of motivation we have!

Like a New Year’s eve countdown, Romans leads to exuberant celebration. While you were lost in your need for a savior, disobedient to God.. Jesus came to give you salvation and life in him. He establishes and strengthens you as you see the revealed plan in Christ. He awakens our souls to thrive through the Spirit. He transforms our lives to care for others and to glorify only him.
3...2...1 “Hallelujah!”