Marveling at the Mystery

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[0:00] And if you have a copy of the Scriptures with you, I'd like you to open up to Romans chapter 11.

Romans chapter 11. If you don't have your own copy of the Scriptures, you can grab one of the Bibles that we have scattered around in the chairs. And if you grab one of those, you just need to turn to page 947. We're going to be on 947 Romans 11 this morning.
And we're simply going to read in a few moments the end of chapter 11. But before we do that, we need to remember how we've gotten here because it's taken us some time to get to the end of Romans chapter 11.
Chapter 12 turns a major corner where Paul begins to focus on his instructions for practical guidelines on how to live the Christian life. But up to this point in time, he has been teaching us about what it means to be saved, teaching us about what it means to be a follower of Christ, teaching us about God's sovereign plan for all of human history.
He has been teaching us and instructing us. So that really the first eight chapters of Romans we saw was packed full, was loaded full of precious promises from God himself.
[1:23] The first four chapters promises about how we can be saved, how we can come to be right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. He tells us throughout those chapters that we are fallen, that we are sinners, and yet God has in fact sent his son to be what Paul calls a propitiation, a sacrifice that absorbs and removes the wrath of God that was directed toward us.

And Paul says that we can have all the benefits of the work of Christ on the cross by faith and by faith alone. That when we trust in Christ and turn from our sin, God credits our sin to Christ on the cross and he counts us to be righteous in his sight.
And of course chapter 5 begins to transition us toward chapter 6, where Paul begins to give us promises about victory in our lives in the here and now. Justification guarantees that we have eternal life, but we need hope now that we can, now having been declared righteous, actually begin becoming righteous people and that God is actually going to do something to change us and to transform us.
And so he tells us things such as, sin shall not be master over you. That's a powerful promise that we need to cling to in the moments when we're battling and fighting against the sin that still remains and would pull us back and drag us back to who we once were.
And so we hear those kinds of promises throughout chapter 6 and even in chapter 7, until we arrive at chapter 8, which is probably loaded with more promises than any other chapter of the Bible.
[3:07] Where Paul begins by telling us and reminding us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ. Where he tells us toward the end of the chapter, that there is, God is working all things for good for those that love him and are called according to his purpose.

And in between those two promises are promises of eternal glory, promises of adoption into God's family, of being able to legitimately really call God as your father because of all that Christ has done for us and is doing in us.
And then finally chapter 8 closes by telling us that nothing can separate us from the love of God that makes all of those promises possible. Nothing at all can separate us.
So chapters 1 through 8 of Romans, as we have seen over the last couple of years, are chapters that are loaded with life-giving promises for us.
But there lingers over all of those chapters a burning question. And that is, if all of these promises of God come to us by faith in the Messiah, in the Christ, in Jesus himself, what are we to say about all those who have rejected Christ?

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[4:19] And specifically, what are we to say about all of the people of Israel, about all the Jews who have rejected Christ? And now, by Paul's own testimony, because of their rejection of him, they are cut off from Christ, separated from all of those great promises and blessings.

What do we say about that? Is this not the same Israel to whom God gave great promises throughout the Old Covenant, throughout the Old Testament? Is this not the same people to whom he sent prophet after prophet to tell them of the good news that was coming through this long-awaited seed of David?
Is this not the same people? What do we do? What do we conclude if we acknowledge, in the light of everything else that Paul has said in Romans 1-8, those very people are cut off from the promises?
Do we have any grounds? Do we have any reason to believe and to trust in all the promises that he's just now made us, if there's this mass of Jewish people out there who are currently cut off from the promises that he made to them throughout the Old Testament?
And so as we've been walking through Romans 9-11 over the past few months, we have been considering and learning and thinking about Paul's answer to that question, what do we say about lost Israel?
[5:38] What do we say about them? And he gives us an answer that is so stunning, that is so amazing, that he calls it at the end of chapter 11, he refers to that, to his answer, to his final verdict, as a great mystery that he has now revealed to us and made known to us, that we could not before have put together.

All the pieces were available in the Old Testament, but Paul draws those pieces together, he puts them together in a way that we never would have been able to. He opens up the mystery to us so that we can understand, and he does that by saying at the beginning of chapter 9, that there are two Israels.
He says, not all those descended from Israel are Israel. In other words, not all the physical descendants of Abraham belong to true spiritual Israel. And he goes on to argue that God has always had an elect few within the nation of Israel, whom he calls the remnant.
And that has always been the case. Throughout the Old Testament, even now up to God's work under the new covenant, it was never the case that God saved every single individual Israelite.
He never did that. He never saved all the descendants of Abraham. He chose Isaac, not Ishmael. He chose Jacob, not Esau. And with Elijah, he gave Elijah assurance that though the vast number of the Israelites were in fact in rebellion and under God's wrath because of their idolatry, yet God says, I have held back 7,000 that I call the remnant who belong to me.
[7:06] They are mine. There's always been a remnant. And the stunning thing about the remnant under the new covenant is that they have not gone away. The Jewish remnant, the Israel within Israel, has not disappeared from the scene of human history after the coming of Christ.

What is new and different now though, is Paul tells us in chapter 11, that in this new covenant age, what we call the church age, the time after Christ has come, in this age, God is rescuing and delivering and saving a mass of Gentiles.
And he is, as Paul says, grafting them onto the tree of Israel and giving them access to the promises made to Abraham through faith in Jesus. And the amazing thing is that Paul says, and the remnant is being saved now because they are seeing the Gentiles grafted in and growing jealous of the Gentile access to the promises made to their fathers.
And so they want access to the promises. And so they then trust in the Messiah and they are grafted back in. And Paul tells us it's this great work of God, His sovereign hand moving through history to save Gentiles and graft them in, and then to provoke the Jewish people to jealousy and graft the remnant back into the tree so that he can come to the conclusion, as we saw last week, And so, and so in this way, all Israel, which I take to mean all the remnant, all of spiritual Israel throughout all of history, and so they shall all be saved.
And now this morning, we come to Paul's response to everything that he has said in Romans 9 through 11 thus far.
[9:01] And his response is praise. Take a look down in your text at verse 33. This is our text for this morning, verses 33 through 36.

I'd like you all just for a moment to stand as we read the text together, and then I'll let you be seated. Paul bursts forth in praise in light of the mystery in verse 33.

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He says, Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable his judgments and how inscrutable his ways.
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? For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be glory forever. Amen. Let's pray for a moment. Father, we are so thankful for all that you have taught us thus far in this great letter.
[10:01] Of the Apostle Paul. And we are grateful for all that we have learned. Difficult as it has been at times. We are grateful for all that we have learned in these last three chapters.

And so I ask this morning that along with the Apostle Paul, you might grant to us the ability and the desire to respond rightly to this great, beautiful, awe-inspiring mystery of your sovereign hand at work to fulfill all of your work.
We ask these things in the name of Jesus. Amen. You guys take a seat. I can remember it's been almost 15 years.
15 years in September. The day that I got married. And I remember, I have a bad memory in general. You all know that. You're aware of this by now.
That I have a bad memory. If you say something to me today and ask me about it tomorrow, there's about an 80% chance that I'll look at you and go, huh? You know that I have a bad memory. But there are certain things that are just sort of burned into your memory that you remember really, really well.
[11:08] And there are certain aspects of my wedding day that I remember very well. And I remember standing at the very front of the sanctuary, at the very front of the church where we were. It's a church that Allie and I had both grown up in.

And you're standing there. The guy has to go up and stand for a while while everybody stares at him. And on that day, nobody's interested in him at all. They don't want to see him. He looks like every other groom that has ever been up there in his black tuxedo.
Nobody's interested in you and you know nobody's interested in you. And you're nervous anyway, so it's good that nobody's interested in you. Everybody's waiting for the bride to come. Everybody's waiting for the music to cue because they want to stand for her.
Nobody stands for the groom. I'm up there standing for a while by myself and nobody stands. But when the bride comes in, everybody stands. Everybody's ready to see her. Everybody's ready for her to come in.
And so I remember distinctly the moment when finally the back doors over to the side opened and I could catch a glimpse of her. Not everybody knew that she was there yet and partly because her dad had to give her a little push.
[12:08] Get on out there. But not everybody quite knew that she was standing in the doorway yet. But I can remember seeing her and I remember I voiced sort of under my breath. I just went, wow.

And that's the kind of response I think that you have to something that you don't really have all the words to say what you're thinking in that moment.
And that's the kind of thing that Paul does right here at the beginning of these final verses. That's the kind of response that Paul has. We've been sort of working our way through. We've been sort of thinking through all of these things and really having to dig and do a lot of work and turn back to the Old Testament and then come back and we've had to do a lot of work.
And so there are times when we have not stood back to really marvel at the thing that we're uncovering. We have not always been able to stand back and fully appreciate all the things that Paul is teaching us here in these chapters.
But Paul has been because he's the one that's been writing it. He already knows these things. He's just expressing these things for the benefit of the Romans and for our benefit. And so now after having said all of these things, after having unfolded the mystery, Paul begins with a one letter word in Greek and he just says, oh, it's the same in Greek as it is in English.
[13:22] It's just, oh, it's amazing. It's the wow. It's the amazement. It's the inability to fully express your emotional response to the thing that has now been revealed to you.

It's a kind of worship when it's directed toward God himself. It's a way of responding to beauty, a way of responding to something that ought to be marveled at that is entirely appropriate.
And it's the way that I hope that we will respond now that we've come to the end of all this tough sledding through Romans 9 through 11. It's the way that I hope that we will respond now that we

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have spent time unpacking and coming to understand the great work of God through history to direct all things toward the end of all Israel being saved.
We ought to respond this way. We ought to respond with this kind of truly heartfelt emotion, this kind of stunned awe to say, oh, it's amazing.
We all crave for that kind of response to something. We all want something in our lives that will bring us to that point. We're all driven to find these things that we can marvel at.
[14:50] That's why we climb mountains and stand on the top of mountains and look around at the mountain range. That's why we go to the Grand Canyon to look down and be amazed at it. That's why we stand on the seashore and look out at the sun as it hangs over the waters because we want to see things that are bigger than us.

We want to see realities that are greater than us. We are wired for worship. That's what we're made for. That's why we exist. And so we are all looking for something to marvel at.
We are looking for something to wow us. And there are a lot of good things in God's creation that wow us. There are a lot of amazing things that we should take time to appreciate.
A man should say wow when he sees his bride at the back of the church on his wedding day. We should be amazed when our children are born and they come into the world because it's a miraculous thing to behold and to see.
We should appreciate a sunset and a mountain range. All of those things it is entirely appropriate for us to be in awe of them but they are all made to point us toward something even greater.
[16:01] We are designed to delight in our maker. And until we find that we are made for that and until we rest in that we will never feel a sense of peace.

St. Augustine said famously he says that we will never find rest until we find our rest in you God. We are made to rest in him but until we find it in him we will be restless our whole life.
That's who we will be. So that if you have been restless and you've been wandering and you've been aiming and you've been wondering why you're here or what you're supposed to be about the answer is this you exist to see God and the greatness of all that he's done and to stand back and say oh and be amazed by him.
But Paul's amazement at this point is focused. It's specific. It's not just on all of who God is and all of what God has done.
It's specific. Paul's response is to all that he has shown us and taught us and now in the rest of this paragraph he's going to really summarize the reasons for his amazement and his awe.
[17:17] He's going to give us reasons to worship. If we can't remember everything that was packed into Romans 9 through 11 and surely we can't or if you haven't been here for all of that that's okay because he's going to summarize for us in the rest of these verses the reasons for our worship.

So I want you to take a closer look here at exactly what Paul says so that we might be moved this morning to look to him and all. He says oh and this is how he describes initially the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.
Now I want you to pause there for just a moment because it looks on the surface as if Paul is describing three different things. The riches, the wisdom, and the knowledge of God but I'm not sure that's the best way to interpret this statement of Paul.
I think the word riches really probably stands over wisdom and knowledge as almost like an adjective sort of describing those two words so that if you're reading from I think it's the NIV the NIV I believe states it like this oh the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God and I think that's probably correct that both the word depth and the word riches speak to the immensity of God's knowledge and wisdom so that Paul begins by saying we need to first of all acknowledge and know and recognize that God's wisdom and knowledge are beyond anything that we can fathom that they are so immense and so deep and so rich we're never going to get to the bottom of his wisdom we're never going to find ourselves to the point where we're at the end of the knowledge of God it's never going to happen it's full of depth and richness
Paul normally uses this word riches to describe God's grace oh the riches of God's grace he will say in other places the riches of his mercy even at times it's a word that Paul likes to use to emphasize that something is without limit it's it's full and so when Paul comes down to discuss what he calls God's knowledge and wisdom the first thing he needs us to see and know is that it's got depths that you will never fathom and it is it is richer and greater than anything that you can ever ever begin to imagine and then secondly I don't even think that he's talking about two separate things he's not

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talking about three separate things and I don't think he's talking about two separate things as in knowledge and then wisdom we talk like that sometimes we will say things like well you can have a lot of knowledge and not be very wise and that is of course true all of us have probably come across people who are very intelligent very smart they know a lot of information but they're just not very wise it's not helping them to get along in life it may help them to solve specific types of problems but it's not helping them to really navigate life very well so we recognize in the way that we commonly speak that there is a distinction between knowledge and wisdom we've even probably met some people that we would consider to be very wise and yet they may not be as knowledgeable as we are that's normal and that's how we often times will use these two words but that's not the most common way in which the Bible uses these words in fact if you go back and you read the book of [20:46] Proverbs the great book of wisdom in the Bible you will find that Solomon easily moves back and forth between the words knowledge and wisdom and several other words and he uses them all interchangeably to describe really the same thing so what Paul is doing is he's focused he's specific in his praise at the opening of these verses and he's saying we need to ponder we need to be amazed by the greatness of God's wisdom in light of all that he has just said how wise is God that he is directing all the events of human history toward the fulfillment of his promises in a very specific way so that all Israel will be saved how wise is God that all the chaos that we see around us is in his mind not chaos it is the means that he uses to accomplish his purposes and he never fails to accomplish his purposes how wise must he be

Paul highlights it he goes on and says even more notice what he says he says how unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways judgments and ways I think just another way to express knowledge and wisdom he's not switched subjects here he's talking about the exact same thing and he uses two adjectives that are somewhat rare unsearchable and inscrutable you can't you can't really fully understand it Paul has unfolded the mystery for us Paul has explained a lot for us we've had to really dig in to understand these chapters and still at the end of it all Paul says it's inscrutable it's unsearchable you can't understand it all only what I've shown you and you will probably spend most of your life pondering what the apostle has shown you in these chapters you won't exhaust it you won't come to the end of it you'll never be an expert in what
Paul says here but you can be driven more and more to recognize how unsearchable how inscrutable is his wisdom and knowledge his judgment and ways the way that he directs human history the way that he accomplishes his purposes and now he's going to ask two questions just to highlight even more he's pressing this point in he's pushing it further and further but remember this is all praise for Paul this is not he's sitting around contemplating how can I think of different ways to express the same thing this is just praise this is just poetic language this is what we do when we get really really excited we say the same thing over and over and if you're poetic you'll find different ways to say it each time that you!
if you're not poetic if you're like a six year old kid you'll just say the same thing verbatim over and over and over and over to you're certain that everybody in your life has heard exactly what you want to say because you're excited but Paul his mind is a little bit more complicated than that but he's still saying the same thing over and over but now he does it by means of questions who has known the mind of the Lord answer nobody nobody can really fathom the mind of God who has been his counselor nobody counsels God you remember Job and Job decided to finally speak up near the end of the book of Job and say something and God says who is this who darkens who is this who comes into my presence by words without knowledge who dares come in here and say this and speak as if he can counsel me and he shows all these wonders that he has done and he asks the question again and Job says spoke once
I spoke twice I'm going to shut up now say nothing nothing to say I cannot counsel you cannot say anything to you that will inform you of something that you don't know or something that you have not you are not ultimately in control of nothing left to say and Paul is in effect saying we've got nothing to say before the inscrutable wisdom of God we don't inform God of things we don't we don't let God in on the details of things he knows it all and he's in charge of it all and then he goes on to say who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid who has contributed anything to God so that God is now in your debt answer nobody God is nobody's debtor he cannot be a debtor he has made all things there is nothing in the universe that exists apart from God's creative work so you can't give anything to him that he doesn't already own you can't offer anything to him that is not his so you cannot make him your debtor it is not possible

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[25:56] God's wisdom and his judgment and his ways are beyond anything that we can comprehend anything that we can add to in any sort of way and that's who he is that's the portrait of God that Paul has been painting for us throughout these last three chapters that's what Paul has been trying to show us about him and so often we we we cringe at some of the things that Paul says in these chapters because they go against the grain of how we think and feel or what we have been taught in the past so often we find it difficult to receive the things that Paul is saying to us in these chapters because it doesn't line up precisely with what we thought before we read it before we came across it and so so determined are we to avoid acknowledging the things that Paul is revealing to us that we will at times either ignore them or try to twist them and say it can't be what

Paul is saying he must be saying something over here like this and yet his words are plain he tells us what God is like and what God is doing and how he's sovereign over man and over history and over all things and Paul does not see that as something to be avoided in fact the one time when Paul considers the objection the objector to all that he's saying his answer is who are you to talk back to God I'm revealing things about him don't talk back don't complain don't disagree don't try to find somebody who can show you some other interpretation so you don't have to believe this stuff don't do that stand in awe of the God that I'm showing you I'm revealing him to you I'm showing I'm opening up mysteries that people in the past would have loved to have been able to comprehend to the degree that you will be able to don't wiggle and squirm and get frustrated and upset about it be amazed by it that's the only proper response this is the only one there was once a man who gained a clear view of God name was
Isaiah a very clear view in fact a clearer view than we even get here in these chapters in Romans you know because Paul says he says in 1st Corinthians you don't have to turn there but he says that now we see in a mirror dimly this is Paul the same apostle who wrote Romans 9 through 11 who unveiled the mystery for us now we're seeing in a mirror but dimly someday we'll see face to face he says now I know in part Paul knows in part I haven't even figured out everything Paul said in the last 10 verses and he knows in part yeah he says now I know in part then I shall know fully even as I have been fully known even the mystery as Paul unfolds it here it doesn't come to us with absolute clarity but Isaiah stood one day praying in the temple and he saw a vision of God with a kind of clarity that we we don't get until what Paul speaks of in Romans 8 until our glorification but Isaiah had a glimpse just a peek at what awaits us in the future and when
Isaiah saw this vision of God his initial response was not like Paul's here was not oh oh it was woe woe it's me I'm undone I'm ruined and he gives good reasons he says because I am a man of unclean lips I live among a people of unclean lips when Isaiah is confronted with a clear vision of the very same God that Paul has been describing in these chapters sovereign he's introduced in Isaiah chapter 6 as the sovereign one the Lord seated on the throne when Isaiah sees the sovereign one he sees him he is undone he is dying because he stands in the presence of a holy God and he himself is a sinner and as I think about Isaiah's very clear vision of who God is and I think about our response to what Paul is saying here in Romans 11 I think that sometimes sometimes the issue is that we are like
Isaiah we are still covered in our sin we can't stand the sight or even the clear knowledge of who this God is because we can't handle it it's too much for us we're just sinners we're just fallen people but God came to Isaiah after he saw him in the vision God sent an angel to take a lump of coal and to cleanse Isaiah's lip symbolic of cleansing away his sins saying the sin that makes you unable to bear my presence I am taking away and if we come to these chapters and we find ourselves afraid of what we hear not wanting to see the things that are being shown to us we need to remember Romans 1 through 8 we need to remember that God has indeed once again taken the coal to put it to our lips he has sent his son to bear the wrath that we deserve so that for all those in him there really and truly is now no condemnation for those who are in
[31:54] Christ and so as we see and behold the glory of God in his sovereign working out of his plan throughout human history our response if we've trusted in Jesus should be like Paul's and it should be worship but unfortunately there are many many many people who live decent good lives at least compared to those around them who raise families who work hard at their jobs many of them sit in chairs or pews every week on Sunday they sing along and they do all the things that should make them comfortable in the presence of a holy God and yet at the end of doing all of that they still stand filthy because it's only the blood of Jesus that acts as a burning coal to take away our sins and if you have trouble responding to the things that we've been hearing over the last

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couple of months

I don't mean intellectual trouble sure we're going to have some we've wrestled with some things in here and we've had to really figure out how Paul is using this verse of the old I don't mean intellectual struggles I don't even mean the occasional struggle of initially when you hear of God's sovereignty and salvation in chapter 9 bristling at that a bit until you finally come to say I submit myself to I don't mean that kind of initial struggling and wrestling with things I don't mean that I mean having seen God and heard of the unfolding of the mystery of his plan if your response is not to worship if your response instead is to step back and say I don't know about all this stuff it may very well be that what you need is not for me to start back over in chapter 9 and work our way back through to make sure you get it no what you need is to go all the way back to chapter 4 what you need is to go all the way back and to hear
Paul say that we are justified by faith apart from works of the law what you need to hear is God set forth his son as a propitiation a sacrifice of atonement God did that God sent him what you need to hear is that while we were still sinners Christ died for the ungodly and having believed that having accepted those truths entrusted in that savior now you can come prepared and ready to respond the way that Paul responds in worship we are all wired for worship but we are not all capable of worshiping the true God that's the mystery of what it is to be a fallen human being you exist for one reason the glory of God displayed in your life you are born incapable of doing that fallen sin and there is a solution and it is the blood of
Jesus which covers your sin when you trust in him so that having done that you ought to come to the same conclusion that Paul comes to in verse 36 it's the capstone of these chapters it's the capstone of his praise at the end for from him and through him and to him are all things now let's not separate this from what he's been saying in the previous couple of verses it's easy to take these little verses out of context because they sound wonderful and they express great truth even out of context but in context what is he saying all things are from him we just asked the question who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid the answer of course is nobody because God made all things all things are from him he is the giver of all things everything that exists comes from his hand everything your existence owes itself to
God's grace he's the giver of all good things everything is from him but he's not just the giver he's the governor of all things all things are through him the writer of Hebrews says that the universe is upheld by the word of his power speaking of Jesus the whole universe every molecule every piece of a molecule every atom every proton electron and neutron everything that exists the planets and galaxies everything from the smallest to the greatest it all exists because he continues to hold it in existence that's who he is that's what he does but not just the existence of things the course that those things take Charles Spurgeon once said that he did not believe that there was one speck of dust in all the universe that was not controlled by God's sovereignty we might say in our language today there's not one atom in all of the universe falls outside of his sovereign control he governs! [37:20] all things but he governs them for a reason he governs them because he's also the goal of all things all of human history everything that exists exists to bring honor and praise and glory to God himself it's all for him all of it every single thing every bad thing that befalls you in your life happened for the glory of God every sandwich you have ever eaten you're supposed to be eating for the glory of God whether you eat or drink do all things to the glory of God mundane things terrible things wonderful things all for his glory he's the giver and the governor the goal of everything that exists so the only final conclusion you can make to all this is Paul's conclusion to him be glory forever and he says amen not because he's done with the letter because it doesn't mean the end amen means solidity that a big knowledge that to be true not only in reality but in my heart so to him be all glory right

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