



I'm at the stage in my life where I attend a lot of weddings. I like weddings. Weddings are fun. I got married within the last year. My brother got married this summer. Three of my closest friends, plus a cousin, got married this past summer. I've been to a lot of weddings recently. And there are really sort of three parts to a wedding. First you have the ceremony, then you have the reception, and then you send off the married couple to go be married...and whatnot!

Weddings are kind of like the book of Romans. The first 11 chapters are the ceremony. It's good, but it is meaty; lots of talking. Lots of theology. Lots of logic. And that's such an important part, right? In fact, it's the foundation of everything else. Then the last five chapters of Romans are sort of like the actual marriage part. In the ceremony you get told that you're married to serve one another. That God is bringing you together. Lots of abstract but really important things. Then you actually have to live together. You have to actually figure out how to be a good husband, to love and serve your wife.

But in between there is this unique time that we call the reception. And the reception is the fun part. The reception really is a completely unique experience. Because you're married, but you really haven't started your marriage yet. You're just partying. You're dancing. The reception is a time to dance about what has become true and what is coming next. It's not either one though. It doesn't represent what is coming next and it isn't like what just happened. Frankly, it's not as deep as either of those things, but it is just as important.

And that is where we are in Romans today. Today we are at the Romans reception. We are dancing today. Paul has just finished this 11 chapter-long theological argument about how God has effected salvation for everyone who will believe in Jesus, how we are all sinners but God has saved us from our sin, how he has used his people the Israelites and opened up salvation to the Gentiles, how we are grafted in, like an olive branch, how we are adopted in Christ. He has told us about God's intricate and marvelous plan of salvation. And he is about to tell us, in the last five chapters how to live, practically, as Christians, in light of the theology he has just laid out. But here in Romans 11:33-36 he pauses to dance. To celebrate. To have a reception.

Because God Knows What He is Doing

Often this world feels like it is out of control. Every time certain persons win another primary, every time I walk into another

hospital room, every time I hear about another high school student thinking about suicide, every time the news reports another school shooting, another racial injustice, another ISIS advancement, every time my own sin rears its ugly head, every time that friend I love deeply rejects the good news about Jesus, every time I think, "Is there really a plan to fix this? Or are things just spinning faster and faster out of control? Is there a plan to make this right, or is there just chaos?" I'm guessing you can think of a few more ways that things look chaotic from your vantage point.

But this morning Paul celebrates that there is a plan to make things right. That God knows what he is doing, even when we don't. So that is what we are going to do today. We are going to dance. And we are going to celebrate that God knows what he is doing.

My goal this morning is not to teach you something. My goal is not even to tell you to do something, to live out your faith. My goal is to get you to spontaneous and emotionally exclaim with Paul, "Oh...the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God...To Him be the glory forever," because God knows what he is doing.

There are two reasons we can celebrate that God knows what he is doing. First, God is deeper than you. And second, God is wider than you. I'm going to get to what each of those means. First, you can celebrate that God knows what he is doing because God is deeper than you. Paul gives us three ways in which God is deeper than you and me. He says "*Oh the depths of the riches, and wisdom, and knowledge of God.*" Those are the three. "*How unsearchable his judgements, his paths beyond tracing out.*" Then Paul asks three rhetorical questions, and each question corresponds to one of the three ways God is deeper than you, particularly in his judgements and his paths, his ways of working. It is because the depth of God's knowledge, wisdom, and riches are so much deeper than yours or mine that his judgements and ways are so far beyond us.

First, God is deeper than you in knowledge. Paul asks, "*Who has known the mind of the Lord.*" Paul is actually quoting here from a prophecy in the Old Testament, from Isaiah 40. And Isaiah 40 is all about God's plan to redeem his people, how God has forgiven their sin and has a plan to take them out of bondage and restore them. It's the same plan that Paul just got done laying out in Romans 1-11. It's Jesus. Jesus is God's plan to restore the world and to save people. That is why Jesus came, that is why

Jesus died, and that is why Jesus rose again. God's plan to save people is rooted in deep knowledge. Knowledge deals with the facts. Knowledge deals with the study of temporal things. And God knows everything.

- God knows the number of hairs on your head.
- God knows the number of galaxies in the universe.
- God knows who will be the next president of the United States and the next one after that too.
- God knows what tragedy is going to happen in your life.
- God knows the sin that lives in your heart.
- God knows what your kids will be like when they grow up.
- God knows your pain.

God knows everything! God's knowledge is deeper than yours. So we should celebrate that God knows what he is doing because his knowledge is deeper than yours.

How many times have you made a decision about what to do next, but it blew up in your face because you either didn't have a key piece of information or you had the wrong information? In college, a bunch of us got a card for a friend of mine named Michele and we all passed it around and wrote little notes and signed it. When my best friend got it he wrote, "Happy Birthday!" in big letters, which would have been nice if it wasn't a sympathy card for Michele whose grandmother had passed away. My friend still has the card. It was a nice sentiment, my friend just had the wrong information.

There are all kinds of things we do not know. God knows everything. God's plan for salvation has worked and will work because God knows everything! God knows what He's doing! Oh the depths of the knowledge of God!

But second, God is not only deeper in knowledge than you, he is also deeper in wisdom than you. Knowledge has to do with facts. And as we said, God knows everything. He knows all the facts. But wisdom has to do with how to make good decisions using those facts. How many times have you needed to make a judgement call where you actually did have all the facts, but you ended up making a terrible decision about the direction to go?

Paul's next rhetorical question, also quoted from Isaiah 40, is "**who has been the Lord's counselor?**" Again, we are talking about God's plan for salvation, God's ways in the world and his judgements. And Paul asks, "who has ever been the Lord's counselor?" Who has ever advised him? I certainly have. I advise God all the time! Last year at this time I was looking for a job and I had a lot of advice for God. I knew exactly what he should do. You ever been there How arrogant is that? How disgustingly presumptuous to believe that your wisdom surpasses God's!

God's wisdom is deeper than yours. Not only does God have all the facts, he makes good decisions with those facts every time.

God is like the weaver of this tapestry. From this side, it looks like a mess. And you might be tempted to tell the weaver, "I think things would look better if you made the next stitch over here. And maybe you should change the color over in this area. And that looks really bad." But if you were wise you would let God weave the tapestry because the other side looks like this. God's wisdom is deep. He knows exactly what to do with all the information in every situation. And because of that, God's plan to save people and to make everything right again will not be stopped. God knows what he is doing! He has all the information and he will make the right decision with it.

God knows what he is doing, even when you don't. You see, if God is deeper than you in both knowledge and wisdom, that means that sometimes—in fact, most of the time—you will not know what God is doing. That doesn't hurt our faith, that doesn't challenge our faith, it doesn't discredit our faith. If anything it is an affirmation that God is both wiser and more knowledgeable than we are. God knows what he is doing. He is going to accomplish his plan for salvation. It is happening right now! If I were God, I wouldn't let any of the current presidential candidates win the election. But unless something happens that I don't know about, one of them will be our next president. And God's plan will still be accomplished. It will not be stopped. God knows what he is doing!

And third, not only is God deeper than you in knowledge and in wisdom, but he is also deeper than you in riches. Some of you are like, duh, I know. But really. Not only does God have all the facts, not only does God always make the best decisions with those facts, but God also has the resources to make that decision happen.

Paul asks his third rhetorical question, "**Who has given to God, that God should repay them?**" The answer, of course, is no one! Paul is quoting here from another Old Testament text, this time from the book of Job 41:11. The whole book of Job is about this man Job who was a righteous man whom God allows Satan to cause immense suffering. If you go to WBS, you already know this because you've been diving deep into this book all year! Job loses everything—his home, his cattle, his family, his livelihood. And Job has these three friends who try to explain the reason for Job's suffering. They say he must have sinned and so God is punishing him. But Job says that isn't the reason and he's right, but he also does some instructing of God of his own. And the whole book hinges on the end when God finally speaks to Job.

It's this great moment at the end of the book when God tells Job, "**Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations? Tell me if you understand**" (Job 38:3-4). Then God speaks for three chapters questioning Job like this. And it is in these three

chapters that God asks Job, *“Who has given to Me that I should repay him?”* (Job 41:11, NASB).

This is what Paul quotes. The rest of the verse reads, *“Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.”* God is deeply rich. Wildly rich. God owns everything! And God is rich in two ways. God is rich with money. God has all the money in the world. I know some of you all just heard the word “money” in church and you’re ready to run out the door! That’s exactly what you expected to hear when you came, right? Hang with me because I don’t think this is going where you think it is going.

Sometimes we think of God like a poor charity that is just trying to survive in a world that doesn’t care about its cause. No! God is infinitely rich. And the problem with thinking that you are giving something to God that he needs, other than it being completely untrue, is that you might think that because you gave God something he needed he owes you something that you need or want. A bunch of God’s people thought that in the Old Testament. They believed that God commanded them to sacrifice animals to him because he was hungry. They believed when they burned that goat or that cow on the altar they were giving God food that he desperately needed. And if they didn’t give God food he would get hungry. They thought, if we feed our hungry God, he will give us good crops, and good families, and will keep us healthy. He will owe us. And so they brought their sacrifices every single day.

But here’s how God responded to that in Psalm 50: *“I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the insects in the fields are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine and all that is in it”* (Psalm 50:9-12). God is deeply rich. God doesn’t need your money. Brothers and sisters, we do not put our hard earned money in the offering basket each week because we believe that God needs our money for his plan to be accomplished. We do not believe that by putting a \$20 bill in a basket that we are putting the God of the universe in debt so he will give us everything we want. No! God is rich. He doesn’t need your money. We put our money in that basket as an act of worship. We do it because we believe that the mission of God on the Peninsula and around the world is more important than the comfort, pleasure, security, or power it could buy us. We give to God joyfully because we know it is all his anyway.

If that is not your reason for giving, if you are cynical about giving to a church or even just skeptical, or if you are giving to God because you are trying to put him into your debt, stop giving to God. God doesn’t need your money. God is deeply rich. Who has ever given to God that God should repay them?

But God is not only rich in money. He is also rich in spiritual riches. In kindness. And this is dramatically important to the accomplishing of his plan. Most of the time that the Bible talks

about the riches of God it is actually talking about these spiritual riches. The Bible refers to the riches of God as his love, his glory, his grace, his goodness, and his assurance.

In fact, we’ve seen the depth of the spiritual riches of God all throughout the book of Romans over and over again—the love of God has reconciled sinners to himself, the faithfulness of God has kept God from giving up on anyone, the grace of God has allowed you and me to be adopted by God. These spiritual riches are absolutely necessary to God’s plan of salvation being accomplished and God is deeply, deeply rich in them. God is deeper than you. God is deep in knowledge, he is deep in wisdom, and he is deep in riches. And because God is deeper than you are, we can celebrate that God knows what he is doing!

Second we can celebrate that God knows what he is doing because God is wider than you. Look with me at verse 36. *“For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen!”* God is over all things, he covers all things, he is in control of all things. This is what I mean by wider. God is wider than you are.

Paul uses a three-fold expression to tell us this. He says *“all things are from him, through him, and for him.”* In the Greek, this really is an expression. It’s a common expression for Stoic philosophers like Plato to use and hellenistic Jews picked up the phrase and applied it to God. It is a way to say that God encompasses all things; he is the ultimate thing over everything else.

And you can see why. If we break down the phrase it really claims three things, all of which help us to celebrate that God knows what he’s doing—God is the source of all things, God is the sustainer of all things, and God is the goal of all things.

First, God is the source of all things. All things are from God. God creates everything. In fact, everything is his by virtue of the fact that he created it. In the beginning, God. In the beginning only God existed and he existed in himself; nothing else existed. Nothing. And then God spoke. And when God spoke, all of a sudden galaxies and planets and stars and plants and animals and human beings came into existence. Cells and electrons and atomic particles simply appeared. Human beings were not; we did not exist, and by the breath of God, we were. God is the source of all things. He is the source of you. God is wider than you. And if God is the source of all things, then God knows what he is doing with all things.

But God is not only the source of all things, God is also the sustainer of all things. All things are through God. God did not simply create all things and then walk away. If God created all things and walked away everything that God created would cease to exist. All that you see and know, from one end of the universe to the other, is a skyscraper on a firm foundation. If the foundation is no longer there, the skyscraper will no longer be there. The next breath you breath you breath because God allows you to

breath it. Because God is sustaining you, whether you know it or not, whether you are aware of it or not, whether you like it or not, you exist, along with everything you see and know, because the God who created you is also sustaining you. God is wider than you. All things continue to exist through him. And if God is the source of all things, and God is the sustainer of things, then God knows what he is doing with all things!

One more. God is not only the source of all things and the sustainer of all things, but God is also the goal of things. Paul puts it this way: ***“all things are for him.”*** Everything that exists finds its purpose, its goal, its end in God. You and I and everything else in all of creation were created to give glory to God. The Westminster Catechism puts it this way, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” In its founding documents, Harvard University puts it this way, “Everyone shall consider the mayne end of his life and studyes to know God and Jesus Christ which is Eternall life.” The mountains and the trees and the planets and micro-organisms and you and me were all created for God. He is the goal of our existence. And if God is the source of all things, and God is the sustainer of all things, and God is the goal of all things, then God is wider than you are and God knows what he is doing with all things. A man named H.B. Charles puts it this way, “Here is the unfolding of history, the way of salvation, and the story of your life in one sentence.”

God has set a plan into motion. One that is inexhaustibly marvelous, unfathomably intricate, and absolutely unstoppable. It is the plan that Paul has given us a glimpse into in Romans 1-11. It is the story that you and I are sinners. And when you

sin you create chaos and brokenness in this world and because you create chaos and brokenness in the world God created you deserve nothing short of the full wrath of God.

But God knows what he is doing. And so it's the story that because of God's great love for you, and in order to fix what had been marred by your sin, God sent his only Son Jesus to die in your place, so that you might live. So that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. It is the story that not only are you saved out of sin, but you are saved into adoption—you become a child of God and that absolutely nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And it is the story that God never, ever, ever, ever abandons his people. And finally, it is the story that God is making all things right again in Christ Jesus our Lord. God knows what he is doing, even when you do not! Even when chaos surrounds you. Even when life comes crashing down on you. God knows what he is doing! God has the depth of knowledge, of wisdom, and of riches to accomplish his plan and everything—everything—is from him and through him and for him.

So this morning, and every morning, we glorify him because that is what every fiber of our beings were made to do. To God be the glory forever! Amen!

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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