

Key:

Purple – Introduction, Conclusion, Main Points, and Sermon Thread

Blue – Explanation/Exposition

Red – Application

Green – Illustration

Brown – Quotation

Yellow – Sermon Notes

Doctrine leads to Doxology

Romans 11:25-36

Introduction: Amen, church you may be seated. And as you are being seated, go ahead and take your Bibles with me and turn to the Book of Romans 11. And as you are turning there, let me start this morning with a quote from the great preacher, **Martin Lloyd-Jones**. Paul gives us in **Romans 1-11** the greatest doctrinal treatise ever written. And speaking of doctrine, Jones said this once, **“I spend half my time telling Christians to study doctrine and the other half telling them that doctrine is not enough.”**¹

What did Jones mean by that? Well I think he meant that doctrine is super, super important. If you don’t believe that by now, you need to go back and read **Romans 1-11** again. Yes, doctrine is super important, but it needs to lead somewhere. It needs to lead to faith in Christ. And also it needs to lead to worship. And lo and behold that’s exactly where Paul ends his treatise on theology in **Romans 1-11**.²

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ... For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”

That’s how Paul ends this great doctrinal treatise in **Romans 1-11**. So let me say it this way, Harvest Decatur. Doctrine must climax in doxology.³ Theology inevitably leads to the worship of our great God. If it doesn’t lead to worship, then you’re not doing it right.

And by the way, there are going to be aspects of God’s character, God’s nature, and God’s work that we don’t completely understand. There will be. That should not stop us from worshipping God. **C.S. Lewis** tells a great story in his book *Miracles* about a shellfish. And this shellfish laid eyes on a human being for the first time. It was an amazing sight. And this shellfish was overawed by the sight of this human being. And he tried to his best explain to the other shellfish about the glory of a human being. They don’t live in the water. They live on land! **“No!”** And they don’t have shells! **“Get out of here! Really?”** And man is this kind of **“amorphous jelly (he has no shell), existing nowhere in particular (he is not attached to a rock) and never taking nourishment (there is no water to drift it toward him).”**⁴ The shellfish are just overwhelmed by the glory and the mystery of mankind. And as they try to describe man’s nature and man’s ways, inevitably they misconstrue him. But they’re doing their best!

Lewis used that little analogy to illustration our understanding of God. Do you know who we are in Lewis’s illustration, Harvest Decatur? We are the shellfish! And our understanding and description of God is, at best, partial, incomplete, and limited. He is beyond what we can ever truly describe with our doctrines and our descriptions. **So what do we do? How should we respond to this God that we barely understand? But we know he’s there. And we know he is amazing! Here’s what we do. We worship him. We learn about him as best we can, and then when our learning fall short, we worship. In fact, our learning is an aspect of our worship.**

Paul’s going to spend some time teaching us doctrine this morning. He’s going to explain to us something he’s been trying to explain for the last three chapters in **Romans 9-11**—God’s work among the people of Israel isn’t done yet. But Paul doesn’t end this passage with doctrine. He ends with doxology. So let’s start with doctrine and then, before we’re done, we’ll get to doxology.

I want to give you this morning, Harvest Decatur, three statements about Israel’s future salvation from Romans 11:25-36. And the first thing that Paul wants to convey to us is that there is a future hope

¹ The Wisdom of Martin Lloyd-Jones: <https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/wisdom-martyn-lloyd-jones>

² John MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 124: “The doxology at the end of the present passage climaxes the doctrinal section of the Epistle and focuses on the supreme purpose of everything God does—to glorify Himself.”

³ R. Kent Hughes, *Romans: Righteousness from Heaven*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 204: “The term *theology* produces in the mind of the man on the street visions of damp libraries and musty tomes and somber monasteries. Instead, *theology* should suggest light and dancing! And that is what our present passage should do for us.”

⁴ See C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), 108. Cited in Hughes, *Romans*, 205.

for recalcitrant Israel. There is a future mass conversion of Jews prophesied in Scripture and anticipated by Paul. Go ahead and write this down as #1 in your notes.

Israel's future salvation is...

1. **confirmed** in Scripture (11:25-27)

And not just in the Scripture of **Romans 11**. Paul's going to quote **Isaiah** to substantiate his claim that God's not done with Israel. God has a future plan for Israel that involves their salvation.

Paul says in **verse 25**,

²⁵ *Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers:*

Now I could preach an entire message on that statement right there. That is incredibly applicational for us. **Paul doesn't want us to be ignorant. But he also doesn't want us to be "wise in our own sight." He wants to enlighten us, so that we are not unaware about God's plans.** In fact the Greek is more literally here that what we see in the ESV: "I do not want you to be ignorant."⁵ **"I don't want you to not know this mystery, brothers."**⁶ And the "brothers" there is a reference to Christians in Rome. These are Paul's Christian, primarily Gentile, brothers in Christ. He wants us Gentiles to know God's plan for the Jews, but he doesn't want us Gentiles to be cocky. **So don't be ignorant, Harvest Decatur. And don't be cocky, says Paul. Got it?** That reasoning goes all the way back to the **Book of Proverbs** in the OT. **Proverbs 3:7** – "Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil."

"What does Paul want us to be not ignorant about, Pastor Tony?" Good question. Well, the **"mystery."**⁷ Look at **verse 25**.

I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

There is a mystery concerning God's plan of salvation for the Jews. There is something yet to be revealed in salvation history. Remember the tree from earlier, the olive tree (**11:17-24**)? We Gentiles are wild olive shoots grafted onto the olive tree.⁸ We are making Israel jealous says Paul. And there will come a time of future full inclusion (**cf. 11:12**).

²⁶ *And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob";²⁷ "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*

So Paul says here that there will be a coming deliverance of Israel, prophesied in the OT, that still hasn't happened yet. Paul quotes here from the prophet **Isaiah (59:20-21)**. And this is the same **Isaiah** who said that Gentiles will come into the kingdom of God. This is the same **Isaiah** who prophesied that Gentiles will get saved and enjoy the promises of Abraham. Those mysteries have been revealed and experienced by Gentiles. But there's a mystery that still remains. Because that same Isaiah said that Israel will experience a mass conversion at some future date.⁹ They will return to their God.¹⁰ They will be saved. Deliverance will come to them from Zion, that is "Jerusalem." This will happen at some time in the future!

Now when will this happen? Well I believe that this will take place in what's called the Tribulation period after the church is removed from the world and God directs his attention once again to Israel.¹¹ I see

⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 223: "[Paul] used the statement 'I do not want you to be ignorant' when he had something to say that was especially important (cf. Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 10:1; 12:1; 2 Cor 1:8; 1 Thess 4:13). It is always accompanied by the vocative *adelphoi*, 'brothers.'"

⁶ See ἀγνοέω, Moisés Silva, ed., *NIDOTTE* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), volume 1, 133-4.

⁷ MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, 127: "At the end of the epistle Paul defines mystery as being a revelation 'which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God' (Rom. 16:26; cf. Eph 3:5-7)."

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 713: "We who are Gentiles should likewise take these verses as a reminder that we are only part of the great salvation-historical plan of God and that that plan has its climax in the salvation of Israel."

⁹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 552-3: "'All Israel shall be saved' does not mean that every Jew who has ever lived will be converted, but that the Jews living when the Redeemer returns will see Him, receive Him, and be saved. Zechariah 12-13 give the details. It seems to me that there are too many details in these Old Testament prophecies of national restoration for Israel for us to spiritualize them and apply them to the church today." See also F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, TNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 218: "'All Israel' is a recurring expression in Jewish literature, where it need not mean 'every Jew without a single exception', but 'Israel as a whole'. Thus 'all Israel has a portion in the age to come', says the Mishnah tractate *Sanhedrin* (10.1), and proceeds immediately to name certain Israelites who have no portion therein." MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, 128 sees "all Israel" as "the entire nation that survives God's judgment during the Great Tribulation."

¹⁰ See Moo, *Romans*, NICNT, 727-9 for more on Paul's use of this quotation from Isaiah 59:20-21: "With this quotation, then, Paul not only suggests *when* Israel's deliverance will take place; he also makes clear *how* it will take place: by Israel's acceptance of the gospel message about the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ."

¹¹ My view is consistent here with what is referred to as a premillennial dispensational view of eschatology. This view necessitates a differentiation between the church and Israel. See my video "The Church and Israel" for more on that: <https://app.vidgrid.com/view/jRItUn4wN7vg>. But many non-dispensationalist hold to a large scale conversion of Jews based on their exegesis of Romans 11. See Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 2004), 861: "Both Protestant and Catholic theologians outside of the dispensational position have said that the church includes both Old Testament believers and New Testament believers in one church or one body of Christ. Even on the nondispensational view, a person may hold that there will be a

evidence of this in the **Book of Revelation**. I see pointers to this in the **Book of Daniel, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, Ezekiel**, and also Jesus's words in the "Olivet Discourse" (**Matt 24-25**). And when I put all the Scriptures together that have to do with eschatology, that's the study of the end times, that's the best sense I can make of this "mystery" yet to be fulfilled. That at a future time called the Tribulation, the church will be removed, and God will direct his attention once again to the nation of Israel. And there will be great oppression of the Jewish people by a one-world government ruled by the antichrist. The Lord will raise up an army of Jewish evangelists—the 144,000 from the **Book of Revelation (7:1-8; 14:1-5)**. And at the end of this intensive seven-year period of tribulation and a large-scale conversion of Jews, Christ will return to the earth and set up his 1,000 year reign from Mount Zion (see **Rev 19:11-20:6**), which we call the millennial kingdom. My view on this is premillennialism. I am premillennial.

One of our elders, who shall remain nameless, referred to me once erroneously as a "millennial." I curtly told him, "No sir, I'm not a millennial. I was born in 1978. I'm a Gen-Xer, thank you very much." I'm not a millennial. I'm a Gen-Xer. I'm not a millennial, I'm premillennial, you see. I'm premillennial in age and in eschatology.

I premillennial, but I'm also pre-trib. I believe that a mass conversion of Jews will take place during the Tribulation period. And let me be clear about this, because I think there's confusion in our day about this. When Jews get saved at the end of human history in this Tribulation period, they won't be saved apart from faith in Christ.¹² I think that's something that gets confused in our modern-day world where we see the nation of Israel reconstituted and founded upon the ancient religion of Judaism.¹³ When Paul envisions the future "full inclusion" of the Jews, he mean they will put their faith in Christ.¹⁴ There's no salvation apart from Christ for Gentiles or Jews. Paul writes here about a future mass conversion of Jews to their Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Again you might say, "**When's that gonna happen, Pastor Tony? Can you give me more specifics about this? When's Christ gonna come back? When does the Tribulation begin? When's all this going to take place?**" Here's my answer to that, and I know you probably hate it when I say this. I don't know. Jesus said, "no one knows the hour or the day" (**Matt 24:36**). But Paul tells us here that it's coming. A large-scale conversion of Israelites will take place at some point in the future. **Verse 26** is a future tense verb in Greek.

²⁶ *And in this way all Israel **will be** saved,*

The verbs in that **Isaiah** quotation are future tense too.

*"The Deliverer **will come** from Zion, he **will banish** ungodliness from Jacob";*

It's future tense from Isaiah's perspective (700 years before Christ). It's still future tense from Paul's perspective (2,000 years ago). It's still future tense from our perspective today. We still haven't seen a mass conversion of ethnic Jews. I believe this is still to come.

And by the way, when we look at prophetic literature in the OT (the foretelling prophetic part of it not the forth-telling part), some of the prophecies were fulfilled in the time of Jesus, and some of them await a future fulfillment. That's the case with the Isaiah passage here that Paul quotes. That's the case with many of Isaiah's prophecies. And Daniel's! And Ezekiel's! And Zechariah's! Some of them were fulfilled in Christ. Some of them still await a future fulfillment.

Go ahead and write this down as #2 in your notes. Israel's future salvation is confirmed in the Scriptures. It's also...

2. **evidence** of God's great mercy (11:28–32)

Paul says in **verse 28**,

future large-scale conversion of the Jewish people (Rom. 11:12, 15, 23–24, 25–26, 28–31), yet that this conversion will only result in Jewish believers becoming part of the one true church of God—they will be grafted back into their own olive tree (Rom. 11:24)."

¹² Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, 224: "Israel's salvation would be on the same basis as anyone else's, that is, by responding in faith to the forgiveness made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." Moo, *Romans*, NICNT, 724: "[Paul's] point seems to be that the present situation in salvation history, in which so few Jews are being saved, cannot finally do full justice to the scriptural expectations about Israel's future. Something 'more' is to be expected; and this 'more,' Paul implies, is a large-scale conversion of Jewish people at the end of this age."

¹³ Craig S. Keener, *The IVPBCNT* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), Ro 11:28–29: "Most readers today subscribe to one of two systems: Israel and the church are separate and irreconcilable entities, and Israel will be restored; or Christians become the true Israel and ethnic Israel has no more purpose in God's plan. Paul would have rejected both extremes, believing that ethnic Israel as a whole would return to the covenant in the end time, joining the Gentiles and Jewish remnant that already participate in it." Calvin's view is similar. See Calvin's comments in Philip D. W. Krey et al., eds., *Romans 9–16: New Testament*, vol. VIII, RCOS (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 108.

¹⁴ Cyril of Alexandria is correct: "Paul shows that both Jews and Gentiles were guilty of the same thing and that they were likewise cleansed by one and the same grace." Quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 289.

²⁸ As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake.

This is Paul talking to us Gentiles about the Jews. They may be “enemies” as regards the gospel. The Jews were Paul’s enemies in his day. They tried to kill Paul just about everywhere he went in the **Book of Acts**. There was even a group of forty Jews who swore by oath that they wouldn’t eat or drink till Paul was dead (**Acts 23:12-13**). Yeah, they were enemies of Paul as regards the gospel! And the same may be true in our day where the predominant number of Jews reject the Christian gospel. But Paul says,

But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers.

Meaning God has a future plan for Israel that is anchored to God’s promise to the Jewish forefathers.¹⁵ **So don’t despise the Jewish people as enemies, Gentiles. Instead realize that they are future recipients of God’s mercy as a result of his promise.**

²⁹ For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰ For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience,

In other words the rejection of the gospel by the Jews led to salvation for Gentiles. Paul was rejected in the synagogues, so he went to the Gentiles. The Jews persecuted Jesus’s disciples in Jerusalem and thrust them out of the city. Therefore they started witnessing to non-Jews too. We, as Gentiles, are the beneficiaries of Jewish disobedience and rejection of the gospel.

³⁰ For just as you [Gentiles] were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their [the Jews] disobedience, ³¹ so they [the Jews] too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy.

Whew! What’s Paul saying there? He saying three things. **1)** The disobedience of the Jews led to mercy for Gentiles. **2)** The mercy of the Gentiles will lead to jealousy among the Jews. And **3)** The Jewish longing for the mercy shown to Gentiles will someday lead to mercy for Jews. The third statement is the one I want to focus on. Paul says that the Jews will someday see the faith in Christ of Gentiles and the mercy we’ve received, and they will long for that and embrace that. This is God’s pattern for salvation.

³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

Israel’s future salvation is evidence of God’s great mercy. **Israel’s future salvation is confirmed in the Scriptures, and it’s evidence of God’s great mercy.**

And this goes without saying, but I’m going to say it anyway. It’s not only Israel’s future salvation that is evidence of God’s mercy. My salvation is evidence of God’s mercy. Your salvation is evidence of God’s mercy. There is no such thing as salvation without God’s mercy.

Is there anyone here that isn’t guilty of disobeying God? Is there anyone here who is able to decline God’s mercy because of your flawless obedience? Would anyone here want to forfeit God’s mercy in favor of your own righteous standing before God? No! We’ve spent too much time in Romans the last two years to make that mistake. We know that everything we have in terms of salvation and right standing before God is a result of God’s mercy. As I heard a pastor say this last week, “The fact that you got up this morning and took a breath of non-hell-based air is grace.”¹⁶

And one of the essential aspects of the gospel is to realize and recognize your own need for mercy. The fact that God pointed out your sinfulness and your disobedience is an act of mercy itself. Otherwise you would just blindly go on thinking you’re a pretty good person. You would think you’ve got it altogether, and at least you’re better than that person over there.

What Paul is saying here is that what God has done in your life, showing you your disobedience and your need for mercy, God is going to do that on a cosmic scale at some time in the future with a massive number of ethnic Jews. They are going to be shown their disobedience and rebellion. They are going to repent of it. And they are going to receive God’s mercy. And it’s going to be glorious.

³² For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

You might say, **“That’s confusing, Pastor Tony. Why would God do it that way? Pfft! If I were God I wouldn’t do it that way. I’d just show everyone mercy.”** Well if you just showed everyone mercy without exposing their disobedience, no one would be aware of their need for mercy.

You might say, **“Why does God show Jews in the future their disobedience and bring them to his mercy, but not the Jews in Paul’s day? Why not the Jews in Israel right now? Why not the Jewish family**

¹⁵ F. F. Bruce, *Romans*, TNTC, 219: “Paul means that the promises which God made to the patriarchs when he called them are secured to their descendants, not on the ground of merit, but on the ground of God’s fidelity to his word of grace, as verse 29 emphasizes.”

¹⁶ J.D. Greear, “It ends in Wonder,” Romans 11:30-36: <https://summitchurch.com/message/it-ends-in-wonder>

that lives on my block in Decatur, Illinois right now?” You know that’s a good question, and to be honest, I don’t know. **I pray for God to show his mercy to them and quite honestly to everyone who lives on my block and who lives in Decatur. Who can know the mind of God and who has been his counselor?**

You know as we get to the end of **Romans 11** and this epic explosion of praise towards God, I think this is Paul’s way of saying, **“I don’t understand all that God is doing. This is the best sense I can make of it. Here’s all my theology. I’m done! Blessed be the name of the LORD!”**

³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

You know we all have to get there eventually. **“God is sovereign. Man is responsible. I put my faith in Christ and got saved, but God chose me before the foundations of the world. God is three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit, but God is one. Jesus is fully man, but he is also fully God. Jesus created the universe and created mankind, but Jesus also was incarnated into the world as a man and died for our sins. God wrote the Scriptures, but he used man to do it. God preserved his Scriptures and presented these truths to me, so that I might believe and receive Christ as my savior. But I was already predestined to do this before even time began.”** Hallelujah. I don’t know how all of these things come together. But praise God! So be it.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

Everyone with me? Everyone with Paul? Now you know why Paul explodes in praise after 11 chapters of theology! Paul’s done the best he can. He’s done the best he can, by the power of the Holy Spirit inspiring him to write this book, but even Paul has to get to a place here where theology shifts to doxology. No more explanation. It’s time for exultation.

³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* ³⁴ *“For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?”* ³⁵ *“Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?”* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Write this down as #3 in your notes.

Israel’s future salvation is...

3. **motivation** for our worship (11:33-36)

John MacArthur says about these verses: **“Like a mountain climber who has reached the summit of Mt. Everest, the apostle [Paul] can only stand awestruck at God’s beauty and majesty. Unable to further explain an infinite and holy God to finite and sinful men, he can only acknowledge that God’s judgments are unsearchable and His ways are unfathomable.”**¹⁷

“Pastor Tony, I don’t understand election. I don’t understand how God puts that together with human responsibility.” I don’t either. Not completely.¹⁸ I’ve spent hours and hours and hours trying to wrestle that conundrum to the ground. You know where I’ve ended up with that matter? **Romans 11:33.**

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

“Pastor Tony, I don’t understand Romans 9-11. I don’t understand God’s plan for Israel at the end of the age.” I don’t understand it either. Not completely. I’ve tried to make sense of it. I’ve tried, to the best of my ability, to make sense of what God has communicated to us in the sum-total of Scripture about it, and even now after years of studying it, I’m still not 100% sure how it’s all going to shake out in the end. You know where I’ve ended up with that matter.

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

You might say, **“Well why do you spend so much time studying it, Pastor Tony, if you keep ending up in the same place? Why do you spend so much time studying it if you are still unsure of yourself at the end of it?”** Here’s why. Because it’s fun. Because I love it. I love worshiping the LORD with my mind and trying to understand his ways. And I love getting to the end of myself and eventually conceding:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

¹⁷ MacArthur, *Romans 9-16*, 135.

¹⁸ Origen’s observations are correct here: “Paul did not say that God’s judgments were hard to search out but that they could not be searched out at all. He did not say that God’s ways were hard to find out but that they were impossible to find out. For however far one may advance in the search and make progress through an increasingly earnest study, even when aided and enlightened in the mind by God’s grace, he will never be able to reach the final goal of his inquiries.” Quoted in Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 291.

You know I heard this last week that John Calvin's favorite verse in the Bible was **Deuteronomy 29:29**.¹⁹ John Calvin, this great learned man who wrote pages and pages of commentary on Scripture and wrote one of the most important books ever written on systematic theology entitled *Institutes of the Christian Religion*... His favorite verse in the Bible was **Deuteronomy 29:29**. "The secret things belong to the LORD our God..." "The secret things belong to the Lord, John Calvin. Even you can't figure them out." "The secret things belong to the LORD our God... but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

Remember what God told Job in the **Book of Job**? I'm not so sure that Paul isn't alluding to the **Book of Job** here in **Romans 11**. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (**Job 38:2**). I wonder sometimes if that's what God makes of our best attempts at theology and philosophy. "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (**Job 38:2**). That's why I feel so strongly that our doctrine must eventually give way to doxology.

Paul says in **verse 34**,

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?"

Isaiah 55:8-9 says this: "'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord. 'As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"

"Well if I were you, God!" **No! Don't say that. Don't embarrass yourself by thinking you would do things better if you were God.**

"Well when I get to heaven, Pastor Tony, I'm gonna give God a piece of my mind..." **No you won't. You know what you'll do when you get to heaven. You will fall on your face before him.**

I heard this last week about the death of the longtime host of "Inside the Actors Studio," **James Lipton**. Lipton was a writer and actor himself. "He became famous for his well-researched interviews with A-list actors about their craft."²⁰ And he was once asked what he wanted God to say to him when he met with him at his death. Lipton said, "[I want God to say], you see, Jim, you were wrong, I exist. But you may come in anyway!"²¹ **What foolish, wishful thinking! I hope you aren't hoping for a conversation like that with the LORD when you enter into eternity.**

³⁴ "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"

God is no man's debtor. God doesn't owe us anything.

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

God is the source and the creator of everything.²² All glory is rightly directed towards him and He is worthy of all our praise.

I can't think of a better way to close out this service this morning than with communion and worship. I want our theology this morning to climax in doxology. But before we do that, let me give you one last reason to worship the great God that we serve.

I read this last week that astronomers in Australia have successfully mapped 83% of the visible universe. Using a powerful radio telescope set up in the Outback, they've charted three million galaxies in our universe.²³ And all of these galaxies are comparable to our own Milky Way Galaxy, which if you've ever seen the math on how large just one galaxy is, it's absolutely mind-boggling. And according to this study, our galaxy is just one of more than 3 million.

¹⁹ See J.D. Greear's article "We Want Explanation; God Gives Revelation," July 27, 2015: <https://jdgrear.com/we-want-explanation-god-gives-revelation/>. See also the article "John Calvin on Theological Trespassing" by Aaron Denlinger, November 22, 2014 at the Ligonier Ministries website: <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/john-calvin-theological-trespassing/>

²⁰ Podcast: "The World and Everything in It," December 24, 2020: <https://worldandeverything.org/2020/12/the-world-and-everything-in-it-december-24-2020/>

²¹ Cited at Ibid.

²² Origen and Augustine both see a reference to the Trinity in Romans 11:36 and the three-fold statement, "from him and through him and to him." Theodoret of Cyrillus disagrees. See Gerald Bray, ed., *Romans (Revised)*, ACCS (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 292-3. Martin Luther says "this passage depicts the Trinity excellently!" See his comments and others (Jacques Lefevre d'Etaples, David Pareus, and Tilemann Heshus) in Philip D. W. Krey et al., eds., *Romans 9-16: New Testament*, vol. VIII, RCS (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 116-7. Tilemann Heshus disagrees with Luther: "the doctrine concerning the three persons of the Divinity is handed down with greater clarity in other passages."

²³ See the article by John Stonestreet and David Carlson entitled, "When We Look to the Heavens," December 15, 2020: <https://breakpoint.org/when-we-look-at-the-heavens/>. See also the article Brandon Specktor, "Scientists just mapped 1 million new galaxies, in 300 hours," April 12, 2020: <https://www.msn.com/en-gb/money/technology/scientists-just-mapped-1-million-new-galaxies-in-300-hours/ar-BB1bD2tF>

I've read other studies that have totaled the number of galaxies in the billions not millions. To be honest, I don't know where to begin with all of that. Will we ever know just how big the universe is? Does it really even matter if there are millions or billions of galaxies out there? How can we possibly comprehend a God who is that big and powerful?

All of this brings to mind something I read in Francis Chan's book *Crazy Love* a few years ago. Chan writes, "It's wild to think that most of these galaxies have been discovered only in the past few years, thanks to the Hubble telescope. They've been in the universe for thousands of years without humans even knowing about them. Why would God create more than 350,000,000,000 galaxies (and this is a conservative estimate) that generations of people never saw or even knew existed? Do you think maybe it was to make us say, 'Wow, God is unfathomably big'? Or perhaps God wanted us to see these pictures so that our response would be, 'Who do I think I am?'"²⁴

I'll tell you who we are, we are shellfish trying to make sense of mankind. And yet God loves these little shellfish. God loves these wild olive branches! And he loves the natural olive branches too. And God the Creator of these galaxies loved us enough to become one of us and die for us so that we might have new life in him. The only proper response to that is worship.

³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.

Let's bow together in prayer and then we can take communion together.

²⁴ Francis Chan, *Crazy Love*, Second Edition (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013), 28.