

Romans 11:33-36 ³³ *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!* ³⁴ *“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”* ³⁵ *“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

The Book of Romans

The Basics of Christianity, One Word at a Time: Awe (Worship)

I don't know about you, but I have been a little bit distracted this week. Watching the news of recovery from one hurricane quickly gave way to news about another hurricane and another. The reports and images of devastation; the videos showing the sheer force of the winds; tracking the course of the next storm; seeing the massive spinning circle of clouds from space and the force that these storms have as they roar through cities, states, and island nations, it's shocking; it's terrifying; and it's also something that's hard to look away from or remove our thoughts from entirely. It is something that so easily seizes our attention and holds on to it so tightly, because it is so impressive and profound, imposing and remarkable. We marvel at these massive storms and their size and power especially compared to us. We are tiny, small, and so powerless when compared to these massive forces of nature.

It is only natural for us to stand in awe of such powerful forces. It is all the more impressive then, to consider this: our God is greater, bigger, more powerful than the wind and the waves, the rain and the storm. He is God, the maker, the ruler of heaven and earth. And this God, the maker, the all-powerful ruler of all things, *has mercy on us*. Consider that! Marvel at this incredible wonder! The holy and mighty God who controls the winds and the waves, who has power to sweep us sinners away in a single breath, has mercy on us. Instead of flicking us away from his holy presence he sent his own Son to take away all our sins. The eternal God who made all things, made himself to be born of woman, born under the law, to save us, to be perfect in our place and to sacrifice himself as the payment for all sin. To God be the glory! We marvel at his saving word and how the almighty God has in his great love placed his word into our lives grafted us to himself through the message of Jesus Christ and has given us the free gift of salvation. No wonder Paul exclaimed: ***Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*** ³⁴ *“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”* ³⁵ *“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”* ³⁶ *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. To him be the glory forever! Amen.*

We marvel at the grace and mercy of our God, and what makes it so wonderful is this: This is who our God is. Again and again in his Word the LORD makes it clear that he is a God who is abounding in love and mercy. As the LORD passed in front of Moses, he did so proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger,

abounding in love and faithfulness.” The grace and mercy of God are beautiful and defining characteristics of our God. God in his undeserved kindness does not treat us as we deserve, but instead spares us from punishment and grants us an eternal reward. What a blessing to know from God’s own Word that this is who our God is!

The heavens declare the glory of God, the sky proclaims the work of his hands. We see the power of God as we marvel at the size and complexity of his creation. We rightly stand in awe of the creator as a powerful God. But we would never know for sure from nature if God is loving, or he loves you and me. Therefore, in his Word, God stresses his attributes of mercy and love so that we would clearly know who our God is, so that we would have a complete picture of our God, so that we know that he is our loving God.

Just here in the book of Romans we learn much about who our God is. He is God of incredible mercy and awe-inspiring grace. In the book of Romans we learn that we all fall short of the glory of God, but we are justified freely by his grace (Romans 3:23). God’s Son gave himself as the atoning sacrifice that makes us atone with God. He reconciles us to himself in Christ. He gives us his righteousness. He sets us free from the slavery of sin and death and hell and he gives us salvation as a free gift. ***The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23).*** The awesome mercy of God is really the focus of Paul’s comments. Remember the context of these words. Paul had just described God balance of power and mercy of judgment and grace. ***“Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God; sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you” (Romans 11:22).*** Paul announced to the Gentiles that they had been grafted in to Christ’s Church so that they might receiving the nourishing sap of salvation. Paul even spoke of the continuing grace of God that the LORD would extend to even those who had rejected him. Oh, the mercy of God that extended to all people so that many, both Jew and Gentile would be saved. It is in this context, this context of the mercy of our God, that Paul breaks out into this doxology of praise. ***Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*** ³⁴ ***“Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?”*** ³⁵ ***“Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?”*** We daily sin much, as sinful human beings we confess that we deserve his wrath and punishment both now and in eternity, but how does God respond. He responds with mercy. He forgives our sins in Christ Jesus. He daily watches over our needs of body and soul, and he promises one day to take us to himself in heaven.

We deserve none of this. No one has ever merited that kind of love of God. No one bent the ear of God and helped him come up with this plan. No one has ever given God a big enough donation of time, or talents, or treasures that he or she should be repaid with such forgiveness and favor. No, God gives it to us freely, because he is our good and gracious God. This is who our God is.

It is important to know who our God is. That might seem like an overly simple concept, but when bad things happen, it becomes all the more important to know who our God is. Without a proper understanding of who God is we might think this is merely a representation of God’s anger. Some have speculated that a past hurricane (Hurricane Katrina) was God responding to the immorality of the area and the ungodly actions of nation. If we lack a knowledge of who our God truly is from Scripture, like Luther caught in the lightning storm we may consider God as the God of wrath and judgment and we might interpret any and

every suffering or hardship that we endure as part of his vindictive judgment upon us. We can't make those claims. We shouldn't make those claims. Why not? We are not God. We do not know the mind of God. From Scripture we know that our God is powerful and holy and he hates and punishes sin, but we also know that God is abundant in love and mercy. He has forgiven all our sins in Christ Jesus. He calls us his child. He is our Father who promises to care for us until he brings us to our home in heaven.

There are times in Scripture when he sends destruction or allows hardship and suffering, and he tells us the reason, he reveals to us his righteous plans through his Holy Word. When his will is a mystery we rely on his descriptions of himself as a merciful God and a faithful God. We might wonder why God would allow such storms to hit, such destruction. We don't know the exact reason why. But what do we know. We know who our God is. He is our God and Father. He loves us. He promises to be with us. He may occasionally use hardship and pain to test our faith and bring us closer to him. Our God is most clearly revealed to us in the person of Jesus Christ, and so we know that above all things our God is a God of compassion, a God of grace, and therefore we trust in this defining characteristic of God. We trust that he will do as promised and will make all things work out for the good of those who love him. The God of the heavens and the earth, the Savior who walked on water and calmed his disciples during that horrible storm on the lake will bring peace and comfort to those who are in the midst of storms currently coming off the oceans. He brings such wonderful comfort through the assurance of his saving word that time and again describes our powerful and holy God as a God of mercy and grace. This is who our God is. This is the God in whom we trust and praise.

I would like to share with you some comments from WELS Pastors that were shared over the past few days. Through these words of encouragement, we are reminded of who our God is. In the midst of this storm, in the midst of our troubles in life, whether near or far, what a blessing to stand firmly on the promises of God's Word knowing who our God is, what he has done, and what he will do for his people.

One pastor from Florida writes: *• While the storm is massive in size and power, it is nowhere close to God's infinite power and might. • While the forecast is ominous, God's promises to us are anything but ominous. They inspire hope...always. • While the storm might invoke fear inside us, God's abiding love and faithfulness bring peace to our hearts. **The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. (Isaiah 40:28-29) So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. (Isaiah 41:10)***

Another pastor writes, *Honestly, my mind is jumping all over the place. I am so thankful to be here in Tallahassee. Then I see faces of people I dearly love in Cape Coral and elsewhere. I see my home. I see my church building. I know I have done what I could have done to care for all these things, but now things are out of my hands. I feel a little helpless and tense. But when I lift my eyes above the storm to my God of the heavens and the earth, there are other certainties that He calls to my mind and heart. I also know: -- My God remains the Lord of the skies and the waters, the heavens and the earth. -- My God loves me. He died for me. He has already rescued me from sin and hell. That was also something I had no control over. I was doomed, but my God*

rescued me. -- My God has never failed me. I have never been in want. I have never been forsaken by Him. There are so many times He has acted in ways in my personal life to protect and shelter me. Why would I expect him to suddenly change from his faithful ways? -- Sin has brought this world into a fallen state. My God ultimately wants to rescue me from a world of suffering and sorrows to an eternal kingdom where sin no longer can bring such devastating effects.-- My God's acts are recorded over and over again in Scripture where he has shown mercy and kindness to those who call out to Him. I know He is listening. I know He cares. I know He has not forgotten us. -- My God has made me promises. Those promises are for such a time as this. To listen. To remember. And to find stillness in God's voice.-- My God is the Savior of all. Where I can't be, He can be. My Savior is the Good Shepherd who can and will watch over all his flock. My Savior will neither slumber nor sleep during this storm.-- My God is also working through so many people, friends and neighbors, police, national guard, fire and rescue, government workers, volunteers, and so many others to be a way to provide for those in need. I am thankful for the network of support God has built around me and others. I am thankful that God also provides me an opportunity to be a way for his love to be extended. These truths I know because God has spoken them in His Word. So I am going to keep coming back to them in the next days. My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

In any and all situations of life let us fix our eyes on Jesus. Let us focus on who our God is as we come together to worship and praise him. For our faith is built firmly on our God, who is abundant in faithful and merciful love. It is important to know and go back to these eternal and steadfast truths that our Lord gives to us.

Life and its troubles can be distracting and disturbing. The trials, the pains, the storms of life might leave us unsettled and unsure. Such troubles may even lead us to question God. What a blessing it is to be able to go back to the sure foundation of God's Word time and time again and know exactly who our God is, so that in any situation we can find rest and peace in his steadfast love and unparalleled mercy. We stand in reverent fear and holy awe before the LORD God and we worship him and we praise him. Our God is the God of the heavens and the earth. He has spared us from eternal destruction because of his mercy shown to us in Jesus Christ. He will guard and protect the people of his Church on earth. He will bring his believers, his beloved children, to the glories of heaven when he sees fit.

Worship the Lord through daily prayer and devotion! Come together with fellow believers and marvel in his holy name! Learn more and more about who your God is and rejoice in the truth of his Word. Daily stand in awe of our God, his power and his holiness, and especially his grace and mercy, and with hearts and voices filled with holy awe let us as member of his Church proclaim his praise. ***Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! ³⁴ "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" ³⁵ "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" ³⁶ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.***