

“Strengthened by the Gospel, Awed by the Glory”

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Series: *Romans*

Bible Text: Romans 16:25-27

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Return in your bibles to Romans 16. We're going to be in verses 25 through 27. And if you are figuring it out now or if you knew as you walked in this morning or you've known with just recent weeks as we've been preaching, we are coming to the close of the Book of Romans. January 2025. So that's like roughly a year and a half. Some of you may feel like that's been a long time. I talked to someone this last week and they're like, man, I'm ready for this book to be done. And I was like, I don't know if I would say that, but we're here, right? Some churches maybe have gone several years through the Book of Romans. We've been going a year and a half. And let me tell you, we have not even scratched the surface of the beauty of this letter. It is a glorious explanation of the gospel. And my hope and prayer, I'm looking at myself here as I look out to my church family, may we come back again and again to the Book of Romans to mine the depths and the riches of what is arguably the most expansive explanation of the gospel.

So how does Paul end what many have called the greatest theological masterpiece ever written? He ends it with praise. I'll say that again. He ends it with praise, not a final argument, not a last exhortation, but a climactic word of glory to God. And what we have before us is a doxology. If you are paying attention during the service, you actually just participated in a doxology. You will participate in a benediction at the end of this service. There's a difference between a doxology and a benediction. A benediction is a blessing directed downward from God to his people. A doxology is from you to God. So simply put, just to remind you, a benediction is from God to you, and a doxology is from you to God. And that is what Paul is doing here. His awe, his wonder at the beauty of the gospel, it erupts in these final verses after he has spent 16 chapters going through what we have seen, hopefully over this last year and a half, of just a systematic explanation of the gospel. And before we dive into these few verses, I want to remind you of what we're about to read, what you have heard throughout this service, as you've heard from the word of God. The word of God is light, and it is life. It's not just information. It's not merely to just inform us, but transform us into this holy tension of both fear and hope, distance and nearness, and repentance and faith. And it is not something that just happens that you muster up. No, it is something that by God's Spirit that he does when he speaks through his word that transforms us. So having that at the tip of our tongues, hear from God's word in Romans 16, starting in verse 25.

*25 Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages
26 but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—
27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let me pray.

Lord, speak to us we pray, by your word, by your Spirit, applying it to our hearts, causing us to submit ourselves to its teaching, and to be conformed to the image of your Son. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

One of my favorite movies, in a movie that when I think about glory, when I think about being obsessed with praise and the spotlight and the stage, I think about the movie *The Prestige*. Maybe you've seen it. Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige*. In that movie, it's a movie about magic and two of the actors. You've got Christian Bale and Hugh Jackman. So they're recognizable actors. And the movie is all about kind of formulated off of the three steps of a trick. Okay, so first is the pledge. So the pledge would be the magician shows you like the bird or the deck of cards. And you were like, ooh, okay, what are you going to do with those? And then second, the turn. He makes them disappear, right? It vanishes. And then there is *The Prestige*. He brings it back and the room erupts into wonder. Okay. And so it's essentially, this movie is following these three steps that these two magicians, their rival magicians, and all they want is the glory and the praise. And they're doing these three steps in their show each night. The first magician, Borden, his trick works because he's actually sharing one life with an identical twin. Okay. It's his twin brother. They switch places so completely during the trick that even family, marriage, and ordinary life are sacrificed to the illusion. So he does not merely perform the trick. He lives the trick. And then there's Angier's trick. And this gets a little weird and wonky. So just hang with me. His trick works because he uses a machine to duplicate himself or clone himself. One version appears on the one end of the stage, while the other version, the clone, falls into this vat of water and drowns and dies. Yeah. It's really, really dark, right? Every night that he does this trick, it's literally for him to get glory. It is leading to death and destruction.

And I thought about this movie as I thought about this doxology, weirdly enough, because that's what idols do, don't they? They consume the worshiper. **Idols consume the worshiper.** You may not be into magic and that's okay. We're not magicians here, or we're not on a stage, but we know that urge, right, to crave glory, to want to be admired, to be seen, or to even feel that we are enough. Paul ends *Romans* by relocating glory where it belongs. By centering glory after 16 chapters on sin, judgment, justification, union with Christ, life in the spirit, mercy, holiness, and mission. *Romans* does not end with applause for man, it ends with doxology to God. In other words, do not miss where the glory goes, not to moral man, not to impressive man, not to the strong man, not to us, but to his name be the glory. And in these final verses, Paul gives us three reasons to praise him. The first is power that prevails self. Second is purpose that reconciles. And third is praise that resounds. Look with me at verse 25.

Power that prevails self.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. He begins this doxology by lifting our eyes to God. Now to him who is able, he's ushering us to the throne room of grace, to the feet of Jesus, and prays by reminding us what the gospel is and what the gospel does. Look again at verse 25. *Now to him who is able to strengthen you,* is able carries the reality of power. God is powerful to strengthen his people. And that should take us back to think about in a year and a half, I know it's hard to maybe recall this, but a year and a half when we were in the first chapter of Romans, Romans 1:16, what does Paul say?

For I'm not ashamed of the gospel, for is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

So Paul begins Romans by saying the power of God for salvation. And he ends Romans by praising the God who is what? Who is powerful to strengthen his people according to that same gospel.

Where am I going with this? The gospel is not merely the way that you get in. The gospel is not merely the way that you just get your foot in the door and get that get out of jail free card so that you can go to heaven. The gospel is what carries you, is what strengthens you when you are staring at your worst nightmare. The gospel is power. It is not only a message that saves you, it is a message that carries you. And that strength we need comes only through God's strength.

How often do we get this wrong? A lot. Let's be honest this morning, we live, we have lived this week in a way in which we strengthen ourselves. That is the lie that we give into, that we live to strengthen ourselves, to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps, to be tough, to not show that we are hurting or that we need help or to live a life that is dependent upon the power of the gospel.

That is why I believe our lives are so thin on praise. It is a lie that runs deep. The lie that says my standing before God depends on how well I am doing, how consistent I have been, how diligent I have been, how well I have parented, how I have not failed lately. And when you believe that lie, I do not believe that it leads to a life of praise. When you run that race, it leads to a life of panic. Because if you're standing, if my standing is based on my performance, then I can never rest, I can never breathe, I can never rejoice for long. It is just momentary. I'm not saying anything that you haven't felt in this last week.

Of the things that you choose to stand on rather than the power of the gospel that strengthens you, or I are always one bad week, one sinful thought, one angry outburst, one season of spiritual dryness, one failure as a husband, wife, or parent from believing the lie. Am I still okay with God? That is not praise. That is not praise. That is that is slavery dressed up in religious language. And so I think that we begin to build, we tinker, we tinker, we start to build these little self-salvation systems. So maybe you'll, you know, when you think about wrestling with this in your heart and mind, maybe you think about other things that you can stand on other than the power of the gospel that strengthens you.

So you could maybe stand on morality. I'm not like those people.

You'll stand on theology. I've got good doctrine.

You'll stand on ministry. Look at how much I have served. Look at how engaged I am in these things.

Maybe you'll stand on suffering. Surely this earns me something.

Maybe you stand on comparison. I'm not that great, but at least I'm not that person.

The reality is that none of these things, and you fill in the blank, none of these things will establish you. None of these things will strengthen you. They might for a time, but they will always be found wanting. They cannot hold the weight of your soul. And that is why Paul's doxology begins where it does. *Now to him who is able to strengthen you*, not now to you who are finally able to get your life together. *Now to him who is able.*

Are you alarmed by, if you look at verse 25, were you alarmed by where Paul says, *my gospel*? You could have been alarmed or shocked maybe for the right or the wrong reason. Is he taking credit for God? No. Paul means the gospel that was entrusted to him, the gospel he received, preached, suffered for, that he gave his life away for. His mind, his heart, his will in ministry, have become so united to Christ that he could legitimately call it my gospel. My gospel.

Isn't that what we want? My gospel. Isn't that what we desire? Not just a passing moment this Sunday morning of religious encouragement, not just enough strength to get us through another week that maybe we are apathetic about or that we are loathing or... no. We need gospel power that takes a hold of the whole person and establishes them so deeply in Christ that it is not just what you believe, it is who you are. Because when the gospel takes hold of you, it simply does not give you better behavior. It gives you better glory. St. Augustine said it this way. This is in your bulletin, in the reflections.

“Because the face of God is so lovely, my brothers and sisters, so beautiful, once you have seen it, nothing else can give you pleasure. It will give you insatiable satisfaction of which we will never tire. We shall always be hungry and always have our fill.”

That is what the gospel does. It reorders your loves. It gets you to say the word, Lord, help me to desire and to love the things that you love and to hate the things that you hate.

So the question is not, do you believe the gospel? The question is, has the gospel made you a worshiper? **Has the gospel made you a worshiper?** Because gospel power does not help you just survive another week. It is a righteousness that you did not earn. It is a mercy that you cannot exhaust. It is a savior whose glory is better than anything this world can offer.

I thought about this recently. I had a buddy of mine that I grew up with in church from Nashville. A lot of times he sends me really weird stuff, so I have to filter it. But he sent me something that was of substance this time. This was about a week and a half ago. Tim Tebow, his father, Bob, went to be in glory. He is with Jesus. And at his memorial service, my buddy Scott sent me this video, told me that I should watch it. And at his father's memorial service, Tim Tebow spoke of a man who had given his life to the spread of the gospel. And there is this picture that Tim put up of his dad weeks before he passed at a worship service. And he wasn't preaching. Bob was not preaching. He was not up on stage. He was sitting in his wheelchair listening to the word of God with tears in his eyes in awe of the power of the gospel. That's what the gospel does.

That's what the gospel does. It doesn't just make you useful. It makes you worshipful. It doesn't merely give you something to say, but someone to behold. It doesn't just take a hold of the whole person and establish us so deeply in Christ, but it just changes our loves. It reorients our worship.

That is power that prevails. Paul cannot speak without worshiping. He cannot write this doxology without worshiping. And it doesn't end with our forgiveness, our peace, our stability, or even our transformation. Those things are precious. Those things are glorious. The goal is the glory of God. The gospel strengthens sinners by taking them out of themselves and bringing them into the praise of the most wise God. And it turns self-saviors into worshipers. It turns enemies into brothers and sisters. It turns foreigners and outsiders into family. It turns nations into a choir. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. And that brings us to our second point.

Purpose that reconciles.

Paul says this gospel comes *according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but now has been disclosed and made known to all the nations.*

To understand God's reconciling purpose church, we have to first see that the purpose is found in a person. The purpose is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the gospel, the promised redeemer. And Paul calls this revelation of mystery, and mystery in scripture is not something strange and unknowable. It is something once hidden in the counsel of God and now fully revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. And what is this mystery that Paul is pointing us to? I've said it three times, that God's saving purpose was never confined to one nation, one ethnicity, or one kind of sinner. From the foundation of the world God purposed to reconcile sinners from all nations to himself through Jesus Christ. That is why Paul says that this mystery has been made known to the nations.

Look with me if you want to turn and you are turning your head here a little bit. Romans ends where it begins. Romans chapter one, verse five, Paul says *he received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among the nations*. Now at the end, he says this same gospel has been made known among the nations. So from beginning to end, Romans announces that the gospel is not merely God's rescue of scattered sinners. It is God's eternal purpose to gather a people for himself in Christ. A people chosen by grace, redeemed by blood, called through the preaching of the gospel and brought into the obedience of faith.

Every once in a while, I think that history kind of gives us like a taste or a glimpse of what we one day will see full face-to-face in glory. This side of glory we can only get a taste. But on Christmas Eve in 1914, British and German soldiers sat in trenches along the western front. This is called the Christmas Truce of 1914. Some of you may know what I'm talking about. It's insane. They were enemies divided by barbed wire, mud, fear, and death. And on Christmas Eve along parts of the line, they came out of their trenches and they began singing Christmas carols. These were enemies. They're trying to kill each other. They brought out Christmas candles. Some of them like buried their dead. They exchanged greetings and a nation divided by war stood face to face in momentary fragile peace. If you know that story, you know that that truce did not end the war. It did not reconcile Europe. Eventually and soon it would be swallowed up in violence and they would destroy each other.

The gospel that Paul proclaims is not a temporary ceasefire. It is not a sentimental pause in fighting. It is God's eternal decree breaking into history through the person and work of Jesus Christ to reconcile enemies to himself and to create a new people under one God. That is why Paul begins Romans with *all the nations* and ends Romans with *all the nations*.

God's purpose church has always been bigger than Israel alone, bigger than Rome, bigger than one culture, bigger than one class, bigger than one kind of sinner. In Christ the dividing wall comes down. Philip read that earlier from our passage in Ephesians that Paul is writing to. The dividing wall has come down. Rebels have become sons. Strangers become family. Enemies become worshipers.

Do you not just merely believe the gospel?

Has the gospel made you a worshiper?

My gospel. My gospel.

And when God's power establishes sinners and God's purpose reconciles the nations, there is only one fitting response left.

Praise that resounds.

Praise that resounds.

Paul says this gospel has been *made known according to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith.*

In other words, the spread of the gospel is not accidental. It is not Paul's missionary strategy. It's not the church's clever idea. It is the decree and the command of the only wise God. The God who promised Abraham *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* is now fulfilling that promise in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That is why Romans ends where it begins. Again Romans 1:5 Paul says he received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith and now on the end he says this gospel has been made known to what? Bring about obedience of faith. So the gospel does not merely inform sinners. The power of the gospel that strengthens holds you. It holds you up.

This day, as God is at work, and whatever vocation you have, do you believe that the gospel has the power to strengthen you? Gentiles, outsiders, strangers, enemies are brought into the blessing promised Abraham, and thank God that they do not come by ethnic privilege or moral achievement or religious performance. They come by faith. They come by faith, and let us let us dive a little deeper to the reality that that faith is not without fruit.

The gospel that justifies the ungodly also makes them servants of righteousness.

The gospel that strengthens us also sends us.

The gospel that reconciles us, reorders and reshapes our desires and our wants.

Christianity does not end with you staring at yourself, and that is a mercy, because self-obsession will either make you proud or miserable. Some of us know the language in this room. I'm convicted of this. We know the categories. We know how to sound serious. We know how to sound reformed. We know Christian ease. Maybe we can say enough things right to convince people that we we've got some semblance of understanding. We can talk about grace and not tremble, not be in awe. We can hear of Christ and maybe almost feel nothing. We're like people watching the trick just like in *The Prestige* waiting to dissect. How did he do that? Explain it. Master it. Categorize it while missing the wonder. Missing the wonder right in front of us. That is where *The Prestige*, this movie, helps us. The whole power of *The Trick* is that your eyes are captured. You're drawn in and you're made to ask, how did he do that?

But Paul's doxology is not inviting us to stand back and analyze the gospel like spectators at a magic show. You are drawn in. You are made to ask. No, it is grabbing you by the face and it is saying, look up. Look to Jesus. Isn't he beautiful? Isn't the gospel amazing? Don't miss the glory. Don't miss the wonder. Don't be impressed with your own categories. Don't leave here being impressed with Paul. John Owen says, my favorite Puritan...

“Make up your mind to behold the glory of God by beholding the glory of Christ as the greatest privilege which is given to believers in this life. This is the dawning of heaven. It is the first taste of that heavenly glory which God has prepared for us for this is eternal life, to know the father in Jesus Christ, whom he has sent.”

That is praise that resounds. When bored sinners are awakened, proud sinners are humbled. People who brought what they thought they had already figured out the gospel. Whatever posture you find yourself in this morning. Let the beauty of the gospel wash over you anew this day.

Are you a worshiper? Not that you just believe it, but you are so united to it. You are so tethered to it. You are secure because you know that power is a power that will establish you on your worst day, on your greatest day.

Do not leave here impressed with Paul. Don't leave here impressed with yourself. Don't even leave here being impressed with the doctrine that is so rich and so full in the book of Romans. Leave worshipping the God of the gospel. It is not a trick. It is not a show. He has power to establish you. He has purpose to reconcile nations and he alone deserves praise that resounds forever. Let's pray.

Father to you the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. We praise you that the gospel is not our invention. The gospel is not our achievement or our religious improvement plan. It is your eternal purpose hidden for long ages and now revealed in Jesus Christ. You are the God who is able to strengthen us. Would you strengthen us this morning? Strengthen us according to your gospel. Establish us deeply in Christ. Teach us not merely to believe these things about you, but to behold them, to behold your glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Make us worshippers. And as this gospel has gone out to the nations, would you send us out as servants of Christ? Would you give us the obedience of faith? Would you make our lives display the beauty of the gospel that we confess? May praise resound in us, among us and through us until the day faith becomes sight, and we behold Christ face to face. To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Portion of scripture read before sermon—Isaiah 40:8–11