



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

**“Good Medicine”**

**May 24, 2020**

**Romans 11:33-36**

**Clint Pressley**

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

*<sup>34</sup> “For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”*

*<sup>35</sup> “Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”*

*<sup>36</sup> For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

*(Pastor prays)*

Thomas Ken was a simple and devout man. He rose to some prominence during the political upheaval of the 17th Century England. As a cleric in the Anglican church, he was an Englishman and churchman through and through. After the Restoration he served under Charles II and was at the King's bedside when he died. When James II ascended the throne, he served him as well. But when William of Orange came to the throne, Thomas's conscience would not permit him to serve William of Orange. He was forced into quiet retirement and he was able to devote himself to writing hymns and poems. And his legacy is still heard today in what has been commonly called the Doxology: “Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly host. Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.” The Doxology. It's a brief summation of our reason to worship.

Before us today we don't have a doxology from the pen of Thomas Ken but from the Apostle Paul as he turns and looks out over the awe-inspiring vista of all that grace and goodness found in Romans chapters 9, 10 and 11. Soon Paul will turn our attention to the hard work of Christian living found in Chapter 12. But for now, he sits down on the mountaintop of God's grace and

invites us to look and see that there is no God like our God. All of God's providence at work has brought forth in Paul what feels like a spontaneous, soul-satisfying outbreak of praise. And today, as we walk through this passage, I want you to feel the emotions, see the glory and be satisfied in the grace of our good God. Because there is no heartache, frustration or deep hole of worry that can't be overcome by the ever-living, resurrected Jesus.

### **Worship is Good Medicine for Hard Times.**

I think this passage gives us a great picture of what worship should look like. Let's take a look at it.

### **Worship should be informed**

Another way you might say that is that worship should be **Biblical**. If you take this passage as a whole, it's full of Old Testament quotes, imagery and phraseology so that everything that Paul is saying in this passage is backed up and packed full of the Bible; everything from Isaiah and Jeremiah and Job and even to the Psalms. So much of the Bible was in Paul that it just bled out in his words. For instance, one of the most helpful devotional books I have is called, *The Valley of Vision*. It's a collection of Puritan prayers that sometimes sound like the Bible because the people who wrote those prayers were full, they were saturated, with the Bible.

The Bible informs and directs and guides our worship because it's the Bible that shows us the holiness of God and serves as a mirror to our own souls, showing us our sinfulness and need for Christ. It's the Bible that takes us to the cross of Christ where God's judgment is placed on Jesus and God's grace is given to us. And it's that grace, that forgiving, sustaining, empowering and healing grace, that causes us to worship! Worship is good medicine for hard times. Worship should be informed.

### **Worship should be alive**

Or you might say, worship should be **emotional**. Let me show you what I mean. Look how Paul starts out. Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! You feel that passion. Even in that first word, "oh!" Paul looks back over at how God works in salvation and says, "gracious, how deep God is." So deep that all I can do is say, "oh how deep!" There is nothing below God. There is nothing above God. There's just God. He's too deep. His depth is unreachable. Oh the depth! The depth of His love in Christ causes overwhelming wonder. Oh the depth of His grace causes heartfelt gratitude. Oh the depth of His goodness causes

reverential awe! I can't get down there to the depth of God. So much of God is hidden. In this little phrase in verse 33, Paul stands there astonished at God's riches and wisdom and knowledge. Riches. God owns everything. Knowledge. He knows everything. Wisdom. He knows how to do everything.

And if that weren't enough, Paul backs that astonishment up with two powerful phrases in verse 33: How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable are His ways!

Let's deal with the judgment first. That's the way He does things and what He decides and how He works. It's unsearchable! It's beyond human capacity. We see what happens but we don't know why. Because His judgments are unsearchable. We are often bewildered and even confounded by what He does or allows to happen, and that fact alone throws us into the safety of trusting Him, for His ways are not our ways.

In fact that's what Paul says in the very next phrase. See it in verse 33: How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable are His ways. Let's talk about that little phrase, "His inscrutable ways". "Inscrutable" is not a word we use very much. ("That's an inscrutable haircut you've got.") "Inscrutable" is a rare word that, when translated, means "footprints that cannot be traced or tracked." I immediately thought of that poem, *Footprints in the Sand*. The author of the poem notices during hard times of his life there was only one set of footprints and he asked God where He went. That's when God replies, "the hard times were when I carried you."

It's a great sentiment —and even true— but Paul is saying that he can't always see or even trace how He works or what He is doing. His methods are mysterious and beyond our ability to grasp. In context, he's talking about how God saves people and why some people are saved and some are not. Why two kids can come up in one loving Christian home and one loves Christ and the other goes astray. It's beyond us. We can't see His footprints. Isn't that what Isaiah says in Isaiah 55:9. *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* It is the very goodness of God that should cause us to erupt in real and vibrant and even emotional worship. I hope that when we are back together, we are more expressive and free and captivated by this wonderful sovereign God. Worship is good medicine for hard times. Worship should be informed. Worship should be alive.

**Worship should engage the mind**

Let me show you what I mean. You will find it in verses 34 - 35. In these two verses, Paul reverts back to using rhetorical questions. There are three of them all designed to make a point. Let's read them and answer them.

<sup>34</sup> *"For who has known the mind of the Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?"*

<sup>35</sup> *"Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?"*

Who has known His mind? Or been His counselor? You can't give God advice. He has no counselor or, as John Piper says, "God has a counselor, it's God!" Isn't that what Ephesians 1:11 says. <sup>11</sup> *In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will!* The truth is that we may never actually know why God does what He does, and the point is that Christ and His goodness is enough for us. That last rhetorical question in verse 35 is the one that caught me because that idea of transitional religion is what most people practice and call it Christianity.

When it's not Christianity, it's closer to *karma*. Look at it in verse 35. <sup>35</sup> *"Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?"* It's the idea of owing. You've done something for God and in exchange He should bless you. And the intent behind this third rhetorical question is to remind us that God doesn't owe any of us anything!

We can't place God under some sort of obligation through our good behavior. An illustration would be something like this: I've tried to be a good person; why is this happening to me? The underlying assumption of that thought is that, because of your efforts or your intentions, God should do something for you or at least keep bad things from happening to you. And that is the very opposite of grace and closer to *karma*. If I do something nice, maybe someday someone will do something nice for me. Grace is, we are sinners who live every second deserving wrath and Hell and yet God, through no merit of our own, has placed His love on us and has shown that in sending Jesus to die on the cross in the place of sinners, raised Jesus from the dead so that any undeserving sinner who looks to Jesus, believing in Jesus, submitting to Jesus, that person will be saved by grace through faith in Christ. And it's grace that carries and sustains us, heals us and moves us forward. It causes us to worship. Worship is good medicine for hard times. Worship should be informed. Worship should be alive. Worship should engage the mind.

**Worship should satisfy the heart**

Don't you love verse 36? It's a triple prepositional expression and a great way to finish.

<sup>36</sup> *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.* From Him. To Him. Through Him. All things come from Him. All lives by Him. And all ends in Him! He is the originator, sustainer and the goal of all creation.

If we ask where all things come from, they come from God. If we ask how all things came into being, they came into being through God. And if we ask why all things happen, it's for God's glory. He is the source of all things. He is the agent of all things. He is the goal of all things. To Him be glory forever. And every event of your life has been placed there by God for one purpose. The very end of that doxology -- to Him belongs glory forever Amen.

Can you yield, let go? Can you give yourself, all your pain or past sins over to the glory of God? That yielding starts when you come to the cross of Jesus. At the cross, Jesus Christ took on all of the sin you've committed, all of the judgment you deserve. Jesus takes it there at the cross, but that's not all He does at the cross. It's called the Great Exchange. Jesus gives you all the righteousness that you can't earn, all that you need to stand in the presence of a holy God. And it happens when you turn from your sin and believe in Jesus. I want you to know the goodness of God. I want you to taste the "good medicine" of worship. But that step comes when you give your life to Jesus.

*(Pastor prays)*