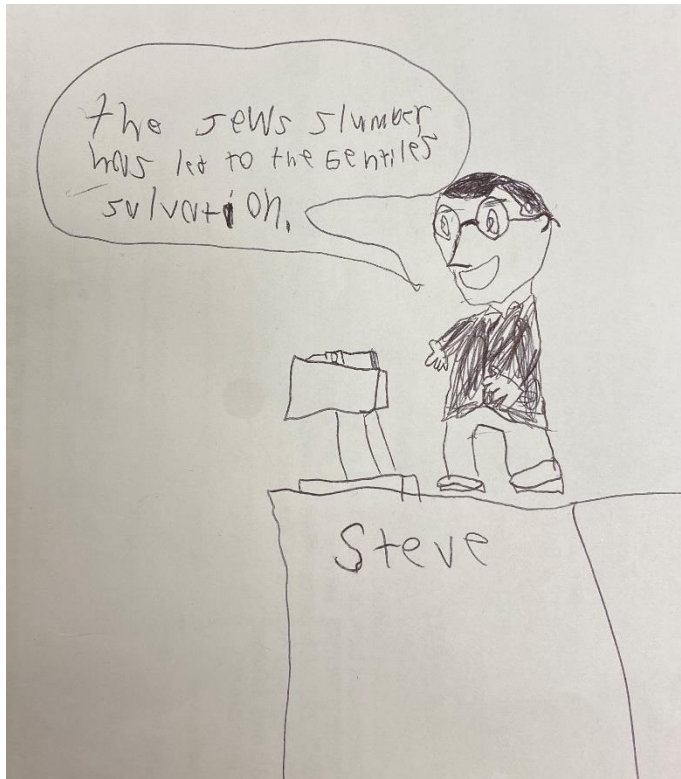


Everything for His Glory Romans 11:36

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One of the joys of being a pastor of a church is the children of our church. Today our campuses have had a couple hundred kids blessing us with their singing. Their artwork is precious too. I received this one (see below) two weeks ago after preaching on the role of Israel and the Gentiles in God's plan from Romans 11.



We should keep our eye on this young man, he has pastoral potential.

Today, we are concluding Romans chapters 1-11—the most doctrinally deep portion of the whole Bible. We have five chapters to go. I want to tell you how proud I am of your response to a series like this. I don't have to tell you that many churches and church folk wouldn't go for this. Too deep. Too long. Too much. But Bethel Church, you have not only hung in there, from all that I can tell you have enjoyed it. Yes? That says a lot about us as a church family.

You can tell a lot about people by what they crave. My daughters would eat candy all day long, but then, they are children. Maturity craves what's best and there is perhaps no Scripture better for Christians than Romans 1-11. Thank you for your encouragement,

listening, and desire to grow. It has been a pleasure to preach through it.

There lies latent within the human heart not only a desire to understand the larger purpose of life, but to sense our place and part in it. We want something that brings cohesion to the apparently shattered fragments of life and society and history and the uncertainties of the future. One thing that explains everything.

Famous physicist Stephen Hawking's search was recently told in a movie whose title summarizes his search and ours as well, *The Theory of Everything*. He sought a unifying truth in the science of astrophysics. Most of us are not nearly that sophisticated, but we search nonetheless. Something that explains everything. Why am I here? Where did I come from? What is my destiny?

World religions try very hard to answer that. So does pop culture by pushing storylines that attempt answers. I'll bet every kid on the stage today has seen *The Lion King*. Without doing voice impersonations, listen to this famous explanation.

"Mufasa: Everything you see exists together in a delicate balance. As king, you need to understand that balance and respect all the creatures, from the crawling ant to the leaping antelope.

Simba: But, Dad, don't we eat the antelope?

Mufasa: Yes, Simba, but let me explain. When we die, our bodies become the grass, and the antelope eat the grass. And so, we are all connected in the great Circle of Life."¹

In Avatar it's Eywa; in this week's *Star Wars* release of *The Rise of Skywalker* it's the force in balance.

These impersonal deities appeal because they connect to our religious sensibilities that crave something ultimate, something worth living for, something worth worshipping. To quote the *Star Wars* heroine, *"I need someone to show me my place in all this."*² She speaks for all of us. What is our place in all this?

Christianity tells a story. This one is true. A grand story that shows me my place in all this. Romans 11:36 tells it simply and succinctly. It flows with all that we have seen in Romans about the one true God and his plan to redeem sinners by declaring us righteous by faith in Jesus, his Son. How he does this is in many ways beyond our ability to comprehend, that's 11:33-35. God's ways are ultimately unsearchable and inscrutable. But then verse 36 (ESV) says,

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

Poetic, isn't it? Three clauses all with the same subject "him." Who is that? The God of the Bible. The God who is God today and always will be. The one true Most High God. That is the "him." Three different prepositions describing "all things" and how all things relate to God and he to them. *From. Through. To. From* him are all things. *Through* him are all things. *To* him are all things. *From. Through. To.*

What are these describing? They are telling the story. The true one. The story of his glory.

Where Did Everything Come From? *From Him* - God the Creator

This is the starting point of the Bible. Is it a coincidence the first book is called "Genesis"? But this is a foundational truth that stands against so many human answers to where the universe came from. The universe is not eternal. It had a starting point. God transcends all that is, which the materialist and the evolutionist scoff at. Need I point out that naturalist evolutionary theory is the basic framework for education in America? Material evolution. Man's attempt to explain what is without a Creator.

On the other end of the spectrum are the circle of life people. 1/7 of the world's population or more are pantheists, most of whom apparently live in Hollywood. They look at the scale and size of the universe and don't see a transcendent Creator, they see the universe itself as god. The atheists and evolutionists say, no God. The pantheists say, everything is god! This is a convenient way of making all of us gods. Pantheism deifies creation, which deifies us.

¹ Mufasa and Simba, *The Lion King* (1994)

² Rey, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* (2017)

But Christianity sees the complexity of the universe and doesn't deny God or deify creation, rather it sees a Creator/artist behind it. *From Him are all things.*

- *"Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (1 Corinthians 8:6).*
- *"One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:6).*
- *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him" (Colossians 1:16).*

How Does it/We Exist? Through Him - God the Sustainer

You may say, *no, no*. The power of the universe is this nuclear energy that holds the protons and neutrons in balance. *No, no*, there's this gravity that keeps the earth perfectly where it has to be in orbit. Any closer to the sun and we would burn up. Any further away, and we would freeze. Gravity does it. *No, no*, there's atmospheric power that brings water from the ocean as a gas and then rains on us to water the soil to produce our food. *No, no, no*. We have hearts that pump blood to our brains and bodies millions of times. Our hearts sustain us. Weather sustains us. Gravity sustains us. Nuclear power sustains us.

Yes, I agree. But where do these come from? God who sustains all things. If God suddenly vanished from existence, everything would stop.

What is the Ultimate Purpose of Everything? To Him - God the Goal

"...to him are all things. To him be glory forever" (Romans 11:36).

What is the ultimate purpose of everything? Where is it all going? Paul ends his whole doctrinal deep dive from Romans 1-11 with this summary statement: *"To him are all things. To him be the glory forever."* These are essentially parallel statements. All things to him and all glory to him is the answer to our questions, what is the purpose of the universe? What is the purpose of my life? What is the purpose of history? Why? Why? Why? *"To Him be glory."*

This is why God does what he does in the way that he does it. God does everything in a way that insures we don't get the glory, but that he does. While this is true of everything, it is powerfully seen in how God saves sinners. Paul isn't explaining nuclear physics. He has spent 11 chapters explaining how God saves sinners. It's all *for Him*.

- *"To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen" (Romans 16:27).*
- *"To whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Galatians 1:5).*
- *"To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen" (Philippians 4:20).*
- *"To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17).*
- *"To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:18).*

So, what is God's glory? God's glory is the infinite worth of God. It includes all his attributes, all his actions, all his perfections, all his beauty, and his excellencies. It is the internal, intrinsic, infinite worth that expresses itself outwardly as glory light. Infinite, intrinsic worth. Brilliant light. Heaven is lit by the glory of the infinite worth of God. If you like Christmas lights, you're going to love the glory of God.

So, everything *for* him means that God purposes and works all things to magnify his own infinite worth. Everything good and glorious flows to him. It's like melting snow that starts on some mountaintop somewhere, into a stream, into a creek, into a river, but ultimately into the ocean. Atoms and galaxies, animals and people, history and your story, are all flowing to the ocean. *"To him are all things."*

So, to summarize, where did all this come from? God. Who sustains it? God. What is the ultimate purpose and goal? God and his glory.

Romans 11:36 should be the heart-cry of the true Christian. It's one thing to read 11 chapters of Romans academically, or religiously, or perhaps even theologically, but the real question is, do you read it biographically? Do you see the story of God's glory as your story? Do you read 11:36 and say, *Yes!*

Romans didn't start here with Godward worship. None of us do. We start as self-worshippers.

Restoration to Godward Worship

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen" (Romans 1:18ff.).

As a result of sin, the human race denies the existence and goodness and glory of God. We would say, *For **me** and through **me** and to **me** are all things. To **me** be the glory.* We don't worship our Creator. We worship created things. We are under God's wrath, judgment, and on our way to hell forever. Where are we with God's glory?

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23).

God's glory is not a motive of worship in our lives; it's a source of judgment. We have fallen short of God's created purpose for us, which is to glorify him in everything. So, Romans from the start is a biographical description of our spiritual state before God. Our worship is a mess. Our lives are a mess. Our world is a mess. Our future is the terror of hell.

But then we read these amazing words in Romans 3:

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe" (Romans 3:21–22).

Jesus is God's Son and Savior for all who personally believe in him. There is a righteousness, a right standing that God gives to all who trust in Jesus as the Son of God who died for our sins on the cross. Romans goes on to explain our salvation in terms of *justification*—God declares us righteous. We are in *union with Jesus* and will be forever. This is an act of God's sovereign love and sovereign grace which he purposed to do before the universe was created.

"And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." (Romans 8:30)

Salvation is many things, but one is we get our worship right. *"To him be the glory forever."*

As worship is so important to get right, I want to chase this down a little path with you. Over the past couple years in our church there has been a growing enthusiasm for what have been called "Worship Nights." These have been an hour or so of primarily music and singing. This is a good thing and I'm happy about it. I also have had a creeping concern that by implication we would equate worship with singing. Pastor Dustin and I, along with the elders, have talked about this as we want to encourage God's people to sing to God but not to minimize worship as only that. Pastor Dustin and I crafted a statement on this that I want to share with you:

"Worship is the privilege and life-blood of the local church. Corporate worship is the gathered community of faith celebrating the gospel of Jesus in prayer, song, communion, singing, preaching of God's Word, and giving. The recent surge in interest in gatherings dedicated to singing is a blessing. God's people singing to God is wonderful. While they are being called 'Worship Nights' we both want to affirm them and avoid the possible error of equating worship with singing only. Let's enjoy the one without minimizing the others and treasure all the means of grace God has provided for his church."

Singing to God is an important and wonderful part of corporate worship. But so are these others. To test this, if we announced a worship night and you got there and the whole thing was prayer, would you be disappointed? *I thought we were going to worship, but all we did was pray!* Or if we just did The Lord's Supper, would you be confused? Worship is a such a sacred and massive expression that we need to be careful we don't minimize it to any single expression. *"Enjoy the one without minimizing the other and treasure all the means of grace God has provided for his people."* I like that.

In salvation, God has reset the table of our hearts. Everything is back where it's supposed to be. Genesis 1 - Good Creator and good creation. Romans 1 - all our spiritual dishes are scattered and broken. The table is upside down. Our hearts are a mess.

Romans 3-11 - by God's grace every dish is exactly where it is supposed to be again. Let the feast begin.

"Everything to Him" Means Everything Matters

Everything is part of the everything that is *from* God, the everything that is *through* God, the everything that is *for* God. It means everything in this creation has a reason and purpose.

It means our lives are not meaningless. It means our families and our stories have enduring purpose. It means power and injustice and suffering don't have the final word. It means in Christ not even death has the final say.

It means that everything that is and everything that happens fits the larger purpose of God. Even our suffering works together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

Everything to him means that Christian relationships go on forever. Think of that. *All to him* means every Christian friendship, every Christian family relationship, every Christian marital relationship is a relationship that lasts forever!

I will be friends with my wife Jennifer forever and ever in a friendship that is even better and closer than the best earthly marriage. My two girls—I can't tell you how precious they are to me and how deeply I long for them to know Christ as their Savior. All to him opens the door to me knowing them and loving them and playing with them and talking with them forever.

This week I took Kiralee to a Christmas party thing as a daddy/daughter date (see picture below).



I told her on the way to the event that we were running late and by the time we get there, the only food that will be left will be vegetables. On the way home I said, "What was your favorite part? The food?" *No.* "The candy cane you're sucking on right now?" *No.* "What was your favorite part?" *The hand holding.*

I want to hold her hand forever.
Madeline too. Mommy too.

What basis do I have for any hope of my life mattering one second after I am dead? Why should I think my life this week makes any difference in the scale of eternity? *"To him are all things."*

I'm a thing! I'm an infinitesimally small thing in the universe. Yet I was created by God. In Christ, every aspect of my life is through him and to him.

Christian, your life matters forever. Your service to God matters forever. Your quiet and behind-the-scenes obedience matters forever. After you're dead and nobody remembers your name or anything you did, God does and will forever and ever. Everything matters because everything is for his glory.

Oh, what a difference salvation makes! Oh, what a difference from Romans 1 to Romans 11. Who makes the difference? God through his son Jesus for all who trust in him as Savior and Lord. By faith in Jesus, God declares us righteous and completely changes the worship direction of our lives.

Is your life in Romans 11 or Romans 1? Do you still worship created things or the Creator? Are you still trying to find meaning in life without God or have you jumped into the river that flows to the ocean of God's glory?

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."
(Romans 11:36)

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