

“Paul’s ‘Wow!’ about God” Romans 11:33-36 NASB

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him *be* the glory forever. Amen.”

Today’s text includes a huge “Wow!” moment. By “Wow” moment, I mean the feeling you get when you witness an astonishing performance.

“Did you see that? How did he do that?”
“She amazed me.”

The extraordinary feat seems so incredible, you become emotional.

A few mornings ago, I read the Gospel of Mark account of Jesus feeding 5,000 persons starting with five small loaves of bread and two fish (6:30-44).

I’ve probably read this passage a hundred times, but I don’t recall ever reading it in Greek.

As I read this account in the language Mark originally wrote it, two things impressed me.

1) I got the feeling Mark might have been there himself.

2) Something else made Mark think “Wow!”
Note Mark 6: 39 & 40 in the NASB.

“Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.”

αὐτοῖς Πόσους ἔχετε ἄρτους; ὑπάγετε ἴδετε. καὶ γνόν-
τες λέγουσιν Πέντε, καὶ δύο ἰχθύας. καὶ ἐπέταξεν αὐτοῖς 39
ἄνακλιθῆναι ἅπας συμπόσια συμπόσια ἐπὶ τῷ χλωρῷ
χόρτῳ. καὶ ἀνέπεσαν πρασιαὶ πρασιαὶ κατὰ ἑκατὸν καὶ 40
κατὰ πενήκοντα. καὶ λαβὼν τοὺς πέντε ἄρτους καὶ 41

Read the following aloud so you can hear how this passage sounded in Greek:
sumpósia, sumpósia epi tō klōro korto
kai anépesan prasiaī prasiaī kata ekatón kai
kata pentākonta.

Alliteration involved repeated “k” sounds. You also heard two duplicated words:

A) Sumposia from which *symposium* comes,

B) And prasiaī, which says that when Mark, saw organized groups of fifty persons as orderly as well tended garden beds, he thought,

“Wow, what a sight!” and “Wow!” again realizing Jesus fed over 5,000 hungry souls.

Mark experienced recurring “Wow” moments when he saw and heard what Jesus did.

In our text, Paul shouted his own “Wow!”

“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!”

Why did the Apostle get so emotional?

Here’s why.

- Paul packed the first 11 chapters of Romans with penetrating, life-altering information. These chapters changed Martin Luther’s life.
- The Book of Romans helped Martin Luther escape a fearful, guilt-ridden life as a monk worried about every minor sin he’d committed.

Luther confessed so much to Johann von Staupitz, vicar of Luther’s Augustinian Order that the vicar exclaimed, “Look here, if you expect Christ to forgive you, come in with something to forgive—parricide, blasphemy, adultery—instead of all these peccadilloes.”¹

- After he intently studied Romans, Luther felt forgiven, liberated, and bold.

¹ Paraphrase *Here I Stand*, Bainton, p 41
Parricide refers to murdering a parent; a peccadillo is a slight offense.

He changed as if a frightened kitten became a lion refusing to back down from anything except God.

- Romans transformed Martin Luther’s life.

Romans contains powerful, compelling info.

Consider some truths about authors-writers.



1. Many write with questionable motivations and intentions: The popular author William Faulkner said: “If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; The ‘Ode on a Grecian Urn’ is worth any number of old ladies.”²
In other words, style and success override morality, values, and even life itself.

Yet at great risk, Paul and other Bible authors emphasized our Creator’s high principles.

2. Many writers admit this truth: “The good writing of any age has always been the product of *someone’s* neurosis, and we’d have a mighty dull literature if all the writers that came along were a bunch of happy chuckleheads.”³

² William Faulkner, quoted in M. Cowley, *Writers at Work*

³ William Styron, interview, *Writers at Work*, 1958

Paul possibly suffered some neuroses; most of us do, but neurosis didn't produce the Book of Romans.

3. Paul didn't write Romans to bolster his ego.

The publisher of writer and transcendentalist philosopher Henry David Thoreau's *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* wrote to Thoreau inquiring how he wished to dispose of 706 unsold copies of the 1,000-book edition. Thoreau asked to have them sent to him and, once stored, Thoreau noted in his journal, "I now have a library of nearly 900 volumes, over 700 of which I wrote myself."⁴



Vanity motivated Thoreau, but not Paul.

After the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a woman asked novelist Harriet Beecher Stowe if she could clasp the hand of the woman who had written the great antislavery novel. "I did not write it," Stowe modestly replied, "God wrote it. I merely did his dictation."

Novelist and critic William D. Howells, however, noted that the text had to be largely rewritten in the margins of her proofs because God's diction, grammar and phrasing were so poor. Also,

⁴ Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) *The Ultimate Reference Book*, p- 414

the book's practical inspiration was a pamphlet written by Josiah Henson, a runaway Maryland slave.⁵

If I write something I consider good, I often pat myself on the back, "Bob, you're so clever."

I should take Isaac Bashevis Singer's advice: "When a writer becomes the center of his [own] attention, he has become a nudnick, and a nudnick who believes he is profound is even worse than a plain nudnick."⁶

After Paul became a Christian, he didn't worry about success, his image, or making money.

He never fretted much about personal criticism or people's approval.

God's wisdom and knowledge overwhelmed Paul.

A British writer commented: "Literature is the art of writing something that will be read twice; journalism what will be read once."⁷

Millions of people have read Romans and it has kept people's attention for nearly 2000 years.

⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896), U.S. writer *The Ultimate Reference Book*, p- 414

⁶ New York Times, November 26, 1978

⁷ Cyril Connolly (1903-1974), *Enemies of Promise*, 1938, ch. 3

And when folks experience what Paul thought and felt, their lives profoundly change.

What did Paul so keenly feel?

What inspired such passionate praise for God?

What “Wow” moment caused him to write:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”?

In Romans chapters 1-11, Paul reviewed three amazing actions of God.

He saw how:

1. Creation reveals God;
2. God planned everyone’s salvation in Christ.
3. God dealt with the Jews in world history.

As someone wrote,

“How odd of God to choose the Jews.”

We have space now to look at only the first point:

How creation reveals God.

Some religious people think that God speaks to us only through the Bible.

In their view, God reveals himself only in Scripture.

Yet Psalm 19 tells us that God talks to us through his creation.

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard.

Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.”⁸

Those majestic, innumerable stars glorify God.

The fact that God speaks through his creation deeply impressed Paul:

“Since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”⁹

The universe’s magnitude exceeds our imagination.

Most of the stars we can see belong to our own galaxy.

Astronomers estimate that our galaxy contains at least 100 billion stars and that hundreds of millions of galaxies exist.



⁸ Psalm 19: 1-4 NIV

⁹ Romans 1:20 NIV



Count the individual grains on the entire world's beaches; the number of stars in the universe may exceed the number of all those grains.

We see stars as “twinkling little things.”

Our sun is a modest sized star.

Yet the sun's volume is more than 13 million times that of earth.

Astronomers estimate that the stars in our galaxy average about ten light years from one another.

They define a light year as the distance a beam of light traveling 186, 000 miles per second will travel in 365 days.

Ever think you'd like to star-hop?

No one will ever stop at any of the stars.

Their superheated burning gasses would kill you and melt your space ship before you got even close.

Want to go from planet earth to a planet belonging to the nearest star?

You'd need to travel at speed of light, which apparently is the maximum speed.

Pack lots of peanut butter sandwiches and potato chips; it will take you about ten years to get there.

You'll also be well-advised to pick good travel companions

When they look at creation, not all people hear God speak.

Here's how I regard that failure.

Think of some folks who live in the pucker-brush. These people know nothing of present civilization.

None has ever seen a modern convenience-not a car, or airplane, or TV, or magazine.

They're completely backwoods.

Imagine that one of their people finds a watch and shows it to the others.

The timepiece makes a ticking noise, its hands move, but no one has any idea why.

People in the group argue about what the watch is.

One of them carefully observes the timepiece notices that the hands on the watch are at about the same location every mid-day.

He concludes that the discovered object is a type of instrument for measuring time.

He takes it apart and finds tiny springs, gears, wheels, and other parts.

Among their people, no one has the slightest ability to duplicate that watch.

But the person who figured out the watch's purpose, they consider a group hero.

They relate stories about the person's genius.

They honor the person with ceremonies.

And build a monument of tribute.

They create legends so future generations will remember this hero.



Yet it never occurs to the group to try locating the person who designed and built that watch in order to give proper praise.

Albert Einstein apparently first came up with the famous formula:

$$E=mc^2$$

As the Columbia Viking Desk Encyclopedia states of Einstein, "In 1953 he announced completion of work on his unified field theory, which attempts to explain gravitation, electromagnetism, and subatomic phenomena in one set of laws."

Civilization properly honors Einstein's genius. He and others deserve recognition.

But do you agree that we owe far greater honor to the "watch maker," the powerful

being who spoke this this vast, wondrous creation into existence?

God created gravitation, electromagnetism, and subatomic phenomena, complex human bodies and minds--brains that struggle to find humility even as we observe and discover increasing evidence that we do not live in the midst of a Cosmic accident, but a multifaceted, intricately designed Universe filled with life precious to our Creator.

"Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse."

I pray that we shall humbly join Paul, who fell to his knees in passionate praise for our maker:

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"

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