



Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship

John Piper

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"God has appointed preaching in worship as one great means of accomplishing his ultimate goal in the world." --John Piper

John Piper makes a compelling claim in these pages about the purpose of preaching: it is intended not merely as an explanation of the text but also as a means of awakening worship by being worship in and of itself. Christian preaching is a God-appointed miracle aiming to awaken the supernatural seeing, savoring, and showing of the glory of Christ.

Distilling over forty years of experience in preaching and teaching, Piper shows preachers how and what to communicate from God's Word, so that God's purpose on earth will advance through Bible-saturated, Christ-exalting, God-centered preaching--in other words, *expository exultation*.

Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship Details

Date : Published April 30th 2018 by Crossway Books

ISBN : 9781433561139

Author : John Piper

Format : Hardcover 336 pages

Genre : Religion, Theology

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Bob says

Retired pastor John Piper looks back over a lifetime of preaching to present principles for proclaiming God's truth. His aim is "to show a God so satisfying that joy would unleash authentic love." His argument is that preaching is an act of worship and serves worship, by defining worship as "knowing and treasuring and showing the supreme worth and beauty of God." God is the focus of sermons, and is glorified in the act of preaching. The preacher feeds faith, helping people see the realities of the human condition and the salvific work of Christ with the "soul-satisfying truth of God's word." Piper warns that sermons differ from commentaries and lectures in that they are (rightly used) a means of exalting God's glory and worth, not with rhetorical eloquence (though he argues for a well-crafted text) but by engaging both the heart and mind of the listener. The preacher speaks with "gladness and gravity," relying on the work of the Holy Spirit to remove spiritual blindness whereby people "experience the God-drenched reality perceived through the window of biblical words." Preachers speak, not by their authority, but by revealing what God says in Scripture. My favorite book on preaching remains John Stott's *Between Two Worlds*, but this is an interesting consideration of the philosophy/theology of preaching.

David Steele says

Expository Exultation by John Piper is the final installment of a three-part series. Piper launched the series with *A Peculiar Glory*, which addressed the truthfulness of Scripture. *Reading the Bible Supernaturally* focussed on reading the Bible for the ultimate purpose of worshipping God. *Expository Exultation* not only completes the trilogy – it satisfies the thirst of preachers around the world who have eagerly anticipated a new book on preaching by Dr. Piper:

"This God-glorifying, Christ-exalting, Spirit-sustained worship – expressed in worship services, daily sacrifices of love, and eternal perfection – is the goal of *Expository Exultation*."

These words encapsulate the intentions and goals of the author and alert readers to the treasure chest that lies ahead. But before he gets started, the author makes sure that readers understand the purpose of preaching:

"The purpose is that God's infinite worth and beauty be exalted in the everlasting, white-hot worship of the blood-bought bride of Christ from every people, language, tribe, and nation."

In a word, *Expository Exultation* is enthralling. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this book, which may, in the final analysis, turn out to be one of the most important books that John Piper has penned to date. Piper captures the essence of the preaching task and marshalls an army of resources to support his claims.

Expository Exultation should be read by rookie and veteran preachers alike. It should be read and re-read. Every Bible College and Seminary professor should immediately add this work to their list of required reading for preaching courses.

I received this book free from the publisher. I was not required to write a positive review.

Ryan Hawkins says

Oh how I wish this 300 page book was 500 pages or even 1000 pages! It was truly a joy to read, filled with gold upon gold.

I knew it would be good, and it didn't disappoint. But as I read it Piper often surprised me a lot with information I'd never heard, especially from him (like his brilliant defense of why it is beautifully fitting for us to worship God regularly, and then how preaching fits into it). And then throughout the book, he connects texts I've never connected.

As for a review, I intentionally am not going to go through the whole book and review much of it. Why? Because honestly it is too much and too good. As I write this sentence now, I just deleted three paragraphs I wrote trying to summarize much of it, but I'd only gotten through like 50 pages of the 300 pages book, and I didn't think I did it justice! So, I will not weakly try.

Instead, I recommend it to you. It isn't his easiest book to read (in fact, I think this newest trilogy—*A Peculiar Glory*, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, and *Expository Exultation*—are some of his hardest books to read). But it is worth it. Trust me. He doesn't write like many others, especially these days. He is rigorous in his organization, his devotion to the biblical text, and then in his logical connections which allow you to see things you've never seen before. This is why he's a famous preacher; this is why his writing, although harder to read than many contemporary Christian books, are devoured by so many; and this book especially shows why his writing and preaching will certainly last centuries after we're all gone.

So if you are in the ministry, or are going into the ministry, this book is an indispensable gift from God to all of us. Throughout it all, you'll pick up theological and practical insights. And then when you get to the concluding chapter, you will joyfully thank God for the serious but glorious responsibility and joy God has gifted you with in preaching the word—as you get to see, savor, and show God's satisfying glory in your expository exultation.

But even if you do not intend on going into the ministry and are just a Christian, this book will grow you in your faith and particularly help you see the reasons for and glories of preaching.

Read, learn, grow, savor, enjoy, see Piper's biblical explanations, and exult in your God.

Justin Dillehay says

For breadth of content and depth of argument, this is one of Piper's finest books (and I've read more than twenty). It makes me want to preach more than ever, though it also makes me question whether I've ever truly preached at all. If you've profited greatly from Piper's preaching and want to know what he was doing that made it so effective, it's all here in this culminating work.

Michael Schmid says

Similar to the other two books in John Piper's trilogy of books about the Bible, I also found this one to address some great and helpful truths, but none of these will join the list of my favourite books by John Piper (e.g. *Desiring God*, *When I Don't Desire God*, *Don't Waste Your Life*, *The Pleasures of God*...). Much of the

material in this book is addressed by Piper in some of his other books or sermons. Nevertheless this book does very well to address the importance of exulting in God through preaching. There is certainly nothing bad about this book, but for me it was not as new or helpful as I hoped it would be.

Barry Oakes says

Listened to the audio book. Piper's focus is on the big picture of entering into and opening up to the congregation the glory of God in the act of preaching, and there is much that is helpful and thought provoking here. I want to go back to it to read a print copy, which I think would be more profitable. Recommended.

Daniel Souza says

This was phenomenal. And for the stage of ministry I find myself, Part 6 was exactly what I needed. There is so much being said these days about Christ-centered (or Gospel-centered) preaching or "making a beeline to the cross" or what it means to know nothing but "Christ crucified" in preaching. But most of the approaches I have read about or even witnessed have seemed like nothing but a sermon on atonement attached to the particular text being preached.

Piper is so helpful in this regard. For example, he says, "The beeline in the Bible is in the OTHER direction (emphasis mine). Christ died so that we would make a beeline FROM the cross to the resurrection to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit..."

He continues a few paragraphs later: "Jesus did not die so that a Bible would be written with a thousand pages describing only Calvary. He went to Calvary so that a thousand glories would be described in the Bible for us to see and savor and show through a crucified life." This is just scratching the surface. Suffice it to say, in this short review, that I found this entire section of the book to be both wonderfully motivating and practically helpful.

Much more could be said. This (and the first two books in the trilogy) should be required reading in every seminary.

Becky says

First sentence: This is a book about preaching in worship.

In the introduction, John Piper writes:

"This book is an organic outgrowth of two previous books. Together they form a kind of trilogy. The first volume, *A Peculiar Glory* (2016), focuses on how we can know that the Bible is God's word and is completely true. The second volume, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally* (2017), focuses on how to read the Bible—specifically, how to read it in the pursuit of its own ultimate goal that God be worshiped with white-hot affection by all the peoples of the world. This third volume, *Expository Exultation*, now asks, If the Bible is completely true and is to be read supernaturally in the pursuit of worship, what does it mean to preach this word, and how should we do it? On what basis does the congregation gather for worship, and why is preaching part of it?"

What is preaching? What is worship? Why is preaching an essential part of worship? Why is corporate worship important? And is preaching an essential part of corporate worship? What kind of preaching is best? What is expository exultation? Why is this the best way to preach? How does one go about preaching? What is involved in preparing the sermon? What is involved in the actual preaching? What should be the minister's goals? What guidelines for preaching does the Bible give us? What does a good sermon look like? A bad one?

Expository Exultation answers these questions...and more. In the hands of another author perhaps this one would not be accessible or readable. In the hands of another author perhaps this one would be a dense academic read: fine for those with years of training behind them but not for the rest of us. But Piper writes with passion AND clarity. God is a God who wants to be known. Piper is a preacher who wants God to be known. For it is only when God is known that he can be worshiped. The absolute best response to knowledge--to understanding--IS worship. The minister's job, Piper argues, is to clearly, logically, passionately show God to their congregations. The job is to connect the Bible--the words on the page--with reality. It is not their job to share their thoughts, opinions, experiences. It is their job to deal with specific texts from the Bible and clearly present God.

The primary audience is pastors or ministers. But, I think it can be read and enjoyed by all believers regardless of their profession. One reason why is that it is focused on worship, focused on the glory of God, focused on the act of glorifying God.

Favorite quotes:

"When the heart is far from God, worship is vain, empty, and nonexistent, no matter how proper the forms are. The experience of the heart is the defining, vital, indispensable essence of worship. This is worship: to act in a way that shows the heart's valuing of the glory of God and the name of the Lord Jesus. Or, as we said in the introduction, worship means consciously knowing and treasuring and showing the supreme worth and beauty of God."

"Scripture is inspired by God in order to awaken, nurture, and bring to final consummation the white-hot worship of the bloodbought bride of Christ from every people, language, tribe, and nation. Preaching is intended by God to herald these Scriptures and advance their purpose. Therefore, preaching aims at worship—that is, it aims to bring into being and sustain a people who know and enjoy and show the glory and worth of God."

"Worship is seeing, savoring, and showing the supreme beauty and worth of the triune God. Preaching is one act of that worship. But human beings cannot see or savor or show this God as their supreme treasure apart from the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who reveals his glory (2 Cor. 4:6), enlightens the eyes of the heart (Eph. 1:18), opens the darkened mind (Luke 24:45), and gives a glimpse of the glory of Christ that the "natural person" cannot perceive (Matt. 16:17)."

"Preaching and Scripture have the same goal. What the Scriptures aim to do, preaching aims to do. What the Scriptures aim to reveal, preaching aims to reveal. The assumption is that Scripture is inspired by God and therefore aims to communicate what human beings need, in order for God's purposes through Scripture to be realized. Preaching that brings out from Scripture what is really there joins God in bringing about his ultimate purposes."

"The words of God are the best means of displaying the glory of God."

Bob says

Summary: Contends that the purpose of preaching is expository exultation; that preaching is integral to worship in the preacher's work of making clear and exulting over the text of scripture as it reveals the glories of God.

This is one John Piper book that I can unequivocally endorse. While I might differ with him in other matters, I found myself saying "Amen" again and again as I read this book. The reason for this is that he recovers and articulates as well as anyone since Martyn Lloyd Jones and John Stott the glory and high calling of preaching. His central contention is that preaching, properly done is "expository exultation." What does he mean by this?

"The title Expository Exultation is intended to communicate that this unique form of communication is both a rigorous intellectual clarification of the reality revealed through the words of Scripture and a worshipful embodiment of the value of that reality in the preacher's exultation over the word he is clarifying. Preachers should think of worship services not as exultation in the glories of God accompanied by a sermon. They should think of musical and liturgical exultation (songs, prayers, readings, confession, ordinances, and more) accompanied and assisted by expository exultation--preaching as worship."

Piper offers a helpful correction to the mentality that says worship is over when the music ends, where the message is kind of a letdown or a time for the mind to wander.

The remainder of the book is an unpacking of the above statement. He begins with a discussion of how fitting it is for the people of God to gather for corporate worship and then shows how preaching as expository exultation is integral to our corporate worship and rooted in the persons of the Trinity. The following two parts of this work focus on both the supernatural and natural aspects of expository exultation--the work of the Holy Spirit and the proper use of our skills to communicate with clarity and logic the reality of God and his work revealed in the biblical text.

The next part of this work was perhaps one of the most illuminating parts for me that explained why much biblical exposition falls flat. We may say what the text says, even individual words, and what it means, and how it bears on our lives. But Piper contends that we often do not clearly communicate the reality to which the text bears witness as we direct attention to the text so that people discover that reality for themselves, not by hearing us, but by seeing that this is what the text says. Good preaching shows how reality shines through the text.

He then turns in the next part to the central realities to which he believes the biblical text bears witness. They are the glory of God, Christ crucified, and the obedience of faith. Piper would contend that all three run through scripture and ought run through our exposition of it. Then in the following part, he shows how these three central realities run through even the Old Testament. He concludes with the reminding the preacher of the high calling and indispensable importance of expository exultation in the life of the church. And he speaks personally to aspiring preachers:

"But he who called you is faithful. He will do it. I testify from forty years in the ministry of the word, through the best and the worst of times, God loves to help the preacher who is desperate to make the word plain for the holy happiness of his people, by the blood of Christ, for the glory of God. He will help you."

So much preaching seems disconnected from the glories of God and the work of Christ we sing and celebrate in music, liturgy and ordinance or sacrament. Too often it seems merely to be an inspirational message to help us engage another week, or a series of marching orders. Piper articulates a vision of preaching consistent with the rest of worship--that God is the glorious hero of the scriptures we preach, that the

decisive act in the story was the life, death and resurrection of the Son, and we are invited through the regeneration and empowering of his Spirit to participate through the obedience of faith in this great venture of God in his world. Those are the realities we make clear from the text of scripture and over which we exult and lead God's people in joyous exultation both in corporate worship and lives of worship. No wonder Piper has been at it forty years and continues to preach and write with such passion!

Disclosure of Material Connection: I received a complimentary review copy of this book from the publisher via Netgalley in exchange for an honest review. The opinions I have expressed are my own.

Bobby Oliveri says

In a way only Piper can deliver, this is both a principled and practical resource for those seeking to understand the higher call of preaching. It's profound, yet attainable, and illuminates the parts of preaching that are difficult to express. It is an extremely helpful treatment on a variety of subjects, from biblical theology to Christian living. It's a longer read, but by no means exhaustive. Highly recommended to all who are serious not only about preaching, but delighting in the glories of God in Christ in every word of Scripture.

Tom Marshall says

John Piper's **Expository Exultation: Christian Preaching as Worship** is a large meal and must be read slowly to be properly appreciated and digested. This is essentially John Piper's collected experience on preaching, but it doesn't focus on technique. It is the third book in a kind of trilogy. The first book, **Peculiar Glory**, focuses on knowing that God's Word is completely true. The second book, **Reading the Bible Supernaturally**, focuses on reading the Bible with the goal of worshipping God. **Expository Exultation** is the natural progression and addresses the question, if the Bible is true and should be read as an act of worship, "what does it mean to preach this word, and how should we do it?"

Purpose

Piper's purpose is fairly straight forward. He aims to convince the reader that preaching is not a stand alone activity, nor is it an detached accompaniment to the worship service. Preaching is worship. Piper writes:

> One of the primary burdens of this book is to show that preaching not only **assists** worship, but also **is** worship. The title **Expository Exultation** is intended to communicate that this unique form of communication is both a rigorous intellectual clarification of the reality revealed through the words of Scripture and a worshipful embodiment of the value of that reality in the preacher's exultation over the word he is clarifying.

Piper writes that preaching serves worship. He biblically defines worship in the first part of the book, but prior to that states in the introduction that preaching serves in three ways. I'm heavily paraphrasing here:

1. It expresses the glory of God and our affection for His excellence and glory
2. It magnifies Christ in life, death, and resurrection as our Savior
3. It points towards a time when our worship will be made perfect in the resurrection

Defining Things

Piper approaches the book as a discussion or argument he is making, building logically on each point that he makes. He asks guiding questions, which he then answers using the biblical text. The book is structured in seven parts.

Parts one and two are defining sections that lay the foundation for the rest of his argument, but these two sections are so good. Piper asks are corporate worship gatherings even necessary? He argues that the Bible says it is “lovely” and “fitting.” “If God reveals that something is ultimately fitting, he has said the most ultimate thing he can say: it fits with his nature and his ways.” In a world of progressive and comfortable Christianity where people post on Facebook that they don’t need church because true worship is fishing from a kayak, these two parts of the book are essential.

Piper goes on to define “exposition,” which he spends significant time on in other parts as well, and “expository exultation.” Piper writes:

> The Devil can do biblical exposition—even speaking true propositions about the text’s meaning. But the Devil cannot exult over the divine glory of the meaning of Scripture. He hates it. So he cannot *preach*—not the way I am defining it.

Parts 3 and 4 look at “how does preaching become a means of the miracle of worship,” both naturally and supernaturally. Piper emphasizes that it is God’s design that we need others to minister to us and to exhort us with the truth of God’s word. When speaking of preaching “naturally,” Piper is not talking about rhetoric. Piper writes:

> Preaching has no interest in such persuasion. Preaching aims to bring about the spiritual sight of the glories of God in Christ. It aims to awaken and sustain the spiritual “taste” that God is supremely beautiful and satisfying. Rhetorical successes short of this are fatal—especially in the church.”

Piper argues that it is only by hearing with faith the promises of God and with the supply of the Holy Spirit that a preacher is able to serve worship. He writes that he knows how frustrating it can be to hear a prescription like that with no practical explanation, so he spends the next chapter using his thirty years of experience to practically explain how he prepared to deliver the message—the actual act of preaching, not writing the sermon.

Expository Exultation

Parts five and six really dive into expository preaching. This is really the main course of the book, and it’s meaty. Piper focuses on rigorous attention to the biblical text to carefully and faithfully present the reality the text is communicating to the congregation. He gives specific, helpful, and practical examples. There’s a lengthy example using Romans and “hospitality.” He also spends several chapters digging into the ultimate goals that can be found in all biblical texts—glory to God, Christ, and obedience of faith.

Part 7 asks and answers whether it is legitimate to apply these ultimate goals to Old Testament texts. Piper says that it depends. He writes, “The problem is that any text can be dishonored and distorted by a misuse of overarching emphases that we apply to all Scripture.” This is why so much attention must be given to the wording of the text. However, he goes on in the subsequent chapters to show how those three emphasis are evident in the Old Testament, with evident changes brought about between Old and New by Christ.

Conclusion

Expository Exultation is chocked full of biblical support and practical examples from Piper using specific

passages of scripture. Although I'm not a pastor, I found this book extremely helpful in thinking of how I lead our small group. This isn't an easy read. Piper is challenging in many ways, but it is worth it. You can get a copy of the book here.

E says

Great book. One of Piper's alltime best--and that's saying something. A powerful plea for Christ-centered, textual-based sermons. He begins by discussing the essence of worship, and why preaching is a necessary component of such worship. He refers to the Spirit's role in making a sermon effective, and then spends a good deal of time looking at the preacher's responsibility.

This was the highpoint of the book, in my view. He calls it "rigorous attention to the text." There is no substitute for careful exegesis of the text at hand. I have heard SO many sermons that use the text merely as a springing-off point for whatever the preacher wants to say (an easy trap to fall into). But instead preachers must seek to show the congregation what the TEXT wants to say. Don't be afraid to get specific, to get the congregation's eyeballs on the page.

Then the final third or so of the book discusses the reality that preaching is to highlight: the glory of God seen explicitly in the cross and resurrection, leading to a life in pursuit of the "holiness without which we will not see the Lord." The last chapter discusses how to do this specifically from the OT.

Piper is a master preacher. One one combines passion with precision like he does. I've heard more passionate preachers (one or two, at most), and preachers who pursue even more detail than he (again, maybe one or two), but Piper is at the top of the BOTH lists. Pastors absolutely need to read this book. Congregants would be well-served to do so as well.

mphumleli says

One of the greatest book I have ever read about preaching.It has really impacted my life and will revert back to it time and again to remind myself about the seriousness of preaching.

Rating 5 stars

It really helped me to labour in God's word to seek to display God's glory in every text of scripture. I will really recommend this book for any preacher or Pastor who is serious about God's word.

Douglas Wilson says

Simply stellar.

Cindy says

What or who do you exalt when sharing the Word of God to others? Where are your thoughts and feelings,

when reading the Word? What do you do with what the Word is telling you? These questions and more are answered clearly by scripture.
