

# (Education for Exultation) I Am the Lord, and Besides Me There Is No Savior

by John Piper

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*John Piper's sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding God's sovereignty as foundational to education that leads to true exaltation of Him.*

**Duration:** 44:56

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 6:7, Isaiah 43:10-13, Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 5:12-21

**Topics:** "God Alone", "Righteous Living"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of 'Education for Exaltation' and its relation to the fundamental values and commitments of the church. The speaker emphasizes the importance of right thinking about God, which leads to right feelings and obedience towards Him. The vision of Education for Exaltation is described as a project that goes beyond just a building, but encompasses the beliefs and mission of the church. The speaker also highlights the role of believers as witnesses, proclaiming that there is no other God besides the God of the Bible.

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## Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at [www.desiringgod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org). Please turn with me to the book of Isaiah, chapter 43, verses 8 through 13. Bring out the people who are blind, even though they have eyes, and the deaf, even though they have ears.

All the nations have gathered together in order that the peoples may be assembled. Who among them can declare this and proclaim to us the former things? Let them present their witnesses that they may be justified, or let them hear and say it is true. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen in order that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he.

Before me there was no God formed, and there will be none after me. I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no Savior besides me. It is I who have declared and saved and proclaimed, and there was no strange God among you.

So you are my witnesses, declares the Lord, and I am God. Even from eternity I am he, and there is none who can deliver out of my hand. I act, and who can reverse it? Lord, when we are swept up into your worshipful presence by And Can It Be, and when we hear a breathtaking word from Isaiah like this, we

either despair that we could ever love you as we ought, preach as we ought, or we are made bold by the word Savior.

There is no other Savior besides me. And I want to hang right there in my preaching. I need a Savior.

I love your sovereignty. I love the sentences that say, I act, and none can reverse it. But if that's all I had, I would be undone.

I need a Savior. And so does everyone in this room need a Savior, a sovereign Savior, else we would be lost. So God, come, please help me to say these things as they ought to be said, and to set us on a trajectory of education for exaltation that will bring us into the decades to come, humble and strong and full of love and power for the glory of our Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. I begin an 11-week series of messages under that banner, Education for Exaltation, this morning. And I want to explain why.

If you're saying, are you ever going to get back to Romans? The answer is yes, God willing. I will get back to Romans. I want to get back to Romans.

I love Romans 5, 12 to 21, where I will pick it up as soon as we can. But every 10 years or so, it seems, in the life of our church, the elders are confronted with some really pressing things. And we need to go back and rethink and examine our fundamental commitments and our philosophy of ministry and the stewardship of growth and the possibility of building a building and how to pay for it and so on.

So for about three years now, the elders have been wrestling with these kinds of things. And they are ready and eager to lay before you now, in the next 11 weeks, a vision called Education for Exaltation. And my task is to unpack it in its relationship to the fundamental values and commitments of our church.

Let me try to give you some taste of the growth we're talking about so that you'll know what's been weighing upon us. This building right here was built in 1991. We came into it in July of 91.

And since then, the worshipping congregation has about doubled. And we push now 2,000 on a Sunday. And sometimes it goes a little bit over, sometimes it drops below, depending on whether your students are on vacation or not.

One interesting thing, I don't think crowds mean very much, as far as real spiritual life goes, because you can attract a crowd with all kinds of things. But when I try to examine what God's been doing, I looked at the mission budget, for example, which says something about the nations and the gospel and our commitment to it. And I noticed that the mission's budget was \$301,000 in 1992.

And I think we just passed a budget of \$850,000 for just the mission. That's money that goes away from us. We don't use that to make the ministries happen among ourselves.

That's about 180%. So we grew 100%, and that part grew 180%, which says to me that I hope this is what it means anyway. I may be so eager to find good news that I read it in.

I don't know. But I hope what it means is that God is not just growing a crowd. He's growing people faster than He's growing the crowd, because our giving to missions, just one little indicator, is running ahead of the percentage of growth.

That's one little tiny thing that might suggest God is doing more. I think He is. Children.

1966, we had about 440 children under 12 on the rolls, and today it is 780. That's about a 77% growth in the last four years. Teenagers, about 130 on the rolls in 1996, pushing 200 now on the rolls, 54% increase of teenagers, and so on.

So we've tasted some of the crowding in this room at two services. We're trying to figure out what to do next there. And we've been praying now for three years.

We've been studying. We've been planning. And we want to lay this vision before you called Education for Exaltation.

Now let's do a little word study here first, because we're going to get this wrong for the next 11 weeks for sure. I know we are, because these are unusual words. The word exaltation is E-X-U-L-T-A-T-I-O-N, not E-X-A-L-T, whatever the rest of it is.

Exaltation, not exaltation. Here's the difference. If you say exaltation because you like the word exalt with an A, no problem.

I won't correct you, at least not in public. And that's great, because when you exalt God, you're doing what it's all about. The reason we have chosen the word exaltation is because it does that and something a little more.

Namely, it takes the emotional component of life, the engagement of the heart, the exalting component, the emotional, joyful, glad, delighted sense, and it says God is exalted with an A most when He is exalted with a U when we exalt in Him most. In other words, we believe here that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him, or you exalt Him best when you exalt in Him most. So, education for exaltation means we want to breed a people and children and teenagers and nations who so know God through education that they don't just think about Him rightly, they exalt in Him.

Now, unpack just a minute the word for, F-O-R, in the middle of that. When this building was built in 90 and 91, it was the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century. We built a building for worship slash exaltation in God at the beginning of the last decade of the 20th century.

Now, here we stand at the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century, 10 years later, and our thoughts are we believe God is calling us to build a building for education. Let me just mention that one of the things that puts this growth issue so high on the agenda after we've been wrestling with it for so long is that that building over there, not this one, not the next one, but what we affectionately call the old sanctuary, it's got the gym in it, it's got the library in it, it's got the Desiring God Ministries in it, that building is in such a terrible state of disrepair that we would either have to spend lots of money just to make it be what it is for us, which isn't all that well designed for what we use it for, or we need to take it down and build something else. And so when we talk about a building, that's what we're talking about, and you'll be hearing a lot more about it.

Take the building down that's attached to that second one and put up a four or five-story structure that will be devoted to education. So we begin the last decade of the last century for exaltation. That's what this room was for.

It's why it's got a high ceiling and so on. And we will build that thing, streamlined, functional, raw, simple rooms, where we can do for children and youth and adults what we're calling education. Then we thought, now how do these two relate? We can think chronologically, we did exaltation and worship first, good.

First things first, and now we need to do some education, but that didn't seem right to us. Because really, when you think theologically and experientially about it, you educate the mind about God to an end. What end? Not just to do more education.

You don't make students to make teachers to make students to make teachers to make students to make teachers. What's the point? The point is those students grow up to become what? Our prayer, our hope is that they grow up to become exalters in God. So we put the education at the front end of the little three-word catchphrase.

Education for to the end of exaltation. And that gets it theologically right. Theology, if you like these big words, theology exists for doxology.

Right thinking exists for right feeling about God and right obedience of God. So that's the phrase that you're going to be hearing over and over. You're all going to receive notebooks here in a couple of weeks called education for exaltation.

And every week we'll put a new thing in it. And there'll be lots of meetings along the way and a lot of information disseminated. My job is to take this theme, this vision that's so much bigger than a building and relate it to what makes this church tick.

What is the value? What are the treasures? What are the beliefs, the rock solid commitments that we have as a church? And how do they relate to this bigger thing called education for exaltation? That's my job now. So what would you do? How would you begin this? They gave me this assignment. They said, we really need for you to draw the big picture of how this project relates to who we are and what we believe and stand for in our mission as a people.

So I'm happy to do this. And the more time I spend on it, the happier I became. Now, I want to begin today with where I would begin if I were to talk about anything, and that is with God.

So you see the title there, education for exaltation in God. And next week it'll be in Christ. And after that, it'll be in the cross or the gospel and we'll build from there.

But we have to start with God. That building, this vision, this people, this pastor, this orchestra, that choir, all our ministries are all about God. I want us to be a God besotted people.

A God exalting people. A God ravished, God cherishing, God loving, God obeying, God trusting, God inebriated. People, be filled with the spirit, not with wine.

Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the spirit. Or as it says in Ephesians 3, 17, be filled with all the fullness of God. That's what we want to be.

It's all about God. And then I thought, I stepped back and I said, all right, what, you got one Sunday to begin this thing and address education for exaltation in God. What are you going to say about him first? And my answer is, I'm going to say, God is sovereign.

And I stepped back. I'll show you this where I'm getting it from the text in just a minute. But I stepped back and tried to ask myself afresh.

I do this every now and then. Piper, why are you so taken with the sovereignty of God? Why do you love the sovereignty of God? Why do you come back to it again and again? Why do you lace it through almost everything you say? Why is it the cornerstone of your ministry? Why do you try to beget young people and college students and singles and married and doers and lovers and thinkers and feelers, all of whom are ravished by the sovereignty of God? What is it? And as I thought it through again, the answer I came up with goes something like this, as simply as I can say it. I cannot distinguish in my mind or my heart my love for God as a person, a holy, infinite, beautiful being.

And my delight in his sovereignty. I can't separate the two. For him to be God in my mind and in my heart is to be sovereign.

And for a being to be sovereign is to be God. To have omnipotence and absolute control over all things is to be God. Not to have that is not to be God.

So I think the reason I love this truth, this reality is because if I lost it, I would lose God. Now, is that so? Let's go to the text. If you were going to choose a text for preaching on the sovereignty of God that you had seen all over the Bible in 40 years or so of study.

Where would you go? You got one Sunday. Where would you turn? And I couldn't help but turn to Isaiah. And I turned to Isaiah 43 and 44 and 45 and 46.

This prophet is breathtaking. What he says about God or better, what God says through the prophet Isaiah is simply breathtaking about his vigilance and his claim and his jealousy to be God. The God of Isaiah is jealous to be God, to be the only God, to be known as God and loved as God and cherished as God and believed as God and trusted as God and obeyed as God.

This God says I a lot. If you're reconciled to God this morning through the blood of Jesus Christ. Who we will talk a lot about next week.

If you're wishing I would talk more about Jesus this morning, please come back next week. If you are reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus this morning, the sheer fact, the raw reality that God is God can be a most glorious, precious, beautiful thing to you. Just contemplating the Godness of God becomes sweet to those who are not afraid of him anymore and for those who have been reconciled to him by the blood of Christ.

Just contemplating what he is, that he is, who he is, what he's like becomes like a meal when you're very hungry. Or like water when you're very, very thirsty. Isaiah is a great fountain and a great banquet table in that regard.

Verse 12 at the end. I am God. Even from eternity I am he.

There is none who can deliver out of my hand. I act and who can reverse it. Now here's what I see in those two verses.

I see God elevating, lifting up his deity, his Godness. He says, I am God. Why does he say that? Why does God just say that? I'm God.

It's because though it sounds so simple. I am God. Three little words.

It is a fact that the world is dying without. I, the father of Jesus Christ. I, the one who elects Abraham.

I, the one who created the world. I, who split the Red Sea. I, who took the people for my own.

I, who gave the law. I, who sent prophets. I, who sent David and will bring his son into the world.

I, who rule the world. I am God. Nobody else is God.

And then, as if to define the essence of Godness. He says at the end of verse 13. I act.

I act. And nobody reverses it. That's sovereignty.

So, in the first phrase, I am God. He lifts up deity. In the last phrase, I act and none can hinder or reverse it.

He lifts up sovereignty. And as I look at the two there. I say, isn't what he is doing.

Is saying, deity means sovereignty. That's what it means to be God. And sovereignty means deity.

If you're sovereign, you're God. If you're God, you're sovereign. There is no sovereign who's not God.

There is no God who's not sovereign. That's why it is so foundational. It is so central.

It is so root-like. And at the bottom of our thinking at Bethlehem about God. There is no God.

If there is no sovereignty. Now, Isaiah is big on this. So, look at two other texts.

I want to just help you feel this prophet's heart. As he lets God speak through his mouth. Look at chapter 45, verses 5 to 7. We'll just pick out two stunning statements of the sovereignty of God.

In relationship to the being of God. Isaiah 45, 5 to 7. I am the Lord. So, there it is again.

God loves to say that in the book of Isaiah. I am Yahweh. I am the Lord.

All caps. When you see an all caps, L-O-R-D in your Bible. It's different from the L-O-R-D capitalized in small letters.

There's a Hebrew word, Yahweh or Jehovah. Which comes through English translations as all caps Lord. And there's Adonai and other words that mean Lord in the sense of functioning as Lord.

Which come through with little L-O-R-D. So, whenever you see the all caps, it's his personal name, Yahweh. Which is built on the Hebrew word, I am.

So, sometimes you'll read in the prophet Isaiah. You know that I am, period. And sometimes he'll say, I am he.

And sometimes he'll say, I am Yahweh. And they all mean the same thing. I, the one who absolutely is, no beginning, no ending, no becoming, am God.

You got to reckon with me or you perish. There is no alternative universe you can choose from. I am over this universe.

I did not come into being. I did not choose to be. I am God.

It just takes the breath away to think about the absoluteness of the existence of God. And that's what's captured in the word, all cap, L-O-R-D. He is Yahweh, the one who simply is.

I am the Lord and there is no other. Besides me, there is no God. I will gird you though you have not known me.

Now, who's he talking about there? He's talking about Cyrus. Who's going to live in a couple hundred years. And he's saying, I'm going to bring Cyrus against my people and make him the servant of my judgment.

And then when I'm done with him in his pride, I'm going to dispose of him. That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides me. I am the Lord.

There is no other. The one forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity. I am the Lord who does all these things.

Earthquakes, floods, pestilence, epidemic, all these things. Who made man's mouth, Moses? Who makes him seeing or blind or deaf or dumb? Is it not I, the Lord? Exodus 4.11. It takes the breath away. It's like a punch to the solar plexus.

It's either true or we have no God. You can create all kinds of alternative gods. You can do it.

You can make this a God. This would be a nice God. It's got wings.

You can do anything you want. But if you want to know God, you go to the Bible, you humble yourself, and you just listen. You don't argue.

You don't talk back. You learn. And you know God.

Zillion problems come to mind, right? Just a zillion problems in your head, in your heart, in your family come to mind. Can you live with us? Can you live and learn? Can you grow? Can your faith seek understanding? He is sovereign because he is God. I am the Lord.

I am sovereign. Here's the other one. Isaiah 46.9 and 10.

Just keep turning. And you can do this on your own. Just read right through Isaiah today.

And you will be swept away by this prophet's vision of God's centeredness. Isaiah 46.9. Remember the former things long past for I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is no one like me.

Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done. Saying, my purpose will be established. And I will accomplish all my good pleasure.

Whatever God wants done, gets done. If he leaves a thing undone, he willed to leave it undone. Thus God foreordains whatsoever comes to pass.

And he brings to pass, either directly or indirectly, all that comes to pass. And he is not a sinner nor unjust. I love the sovereignty of God.

And I hope you'll hear why more before we're done. But don't miss this fact. I am God.

We're back at our text now in chapter 43. I am God. I act and none can reverse it.

I am God. My counsel shall stand and I will accomplish all my purpose. What is at stake here is the Godness of God.

Not just some little teeny attribute about God, but God's being as God is at stake. So the sovereignty of God is the cornerstone of our vision of God. And our vision of God is the cornerstone of education for exaltation.

Have you looked at the curriculum that's used with our children? Since David and Sally Michael have taken over that ministry in the last three years. It's being published now through Desiring God Ministries. And they're selling hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of it across the country.

Because people are starved for God-centered children's curricula. But you know what? This lands on some churches or some teachers with, I can't teach that to kids. I can't say that to kids.

And we're finding that teachers are being transformed mainly. As they take Sally Michael's God-centered vision of how you cannot cheap-shot children. But tell it like it is.

In ways that children can get it. And children are more open to these glorious things than many adults are. And they wrestle with them with less rebellion.

And bow before the sovereignty of God with more quickness of spirit. And handle mystery with greater ease than many adults. And therefore, when we think education for exaltation.

We're not pulling any punches when it comes to teaching our children about the sovereignty of God. Get that curriculum and make it a study for your family. If you don't have little kids, just if you're single.

Get it. Study the children's curriculum. And you will become a God-centered person at a deeper level, perhaps.

How does this happen? How do you get it into the lives of children? Teenagers? We got junior hires away right now. We should be praying for them. God bless the junior hires right now.

That Steven can get it into them. How do you get it into adults? How do you get it into those people at your workplace? Who would scoff at this truth? Neighbors, family members who argue about these things. Is the answer a dream? Does God give a dream to show he's sovereign? Does God do it with reasonings? Mere human reasonings? No.

This text, verse 10, tells us how God does it. It's amazing. Just blown away by it.

Because I'm one of them and you're one of them. And I can hardly bear the weight of it. Look at verse 10.

Isaiah 43, 10. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord. That's how he does it.

He does it with human witnesses. Isn't that amazing? The sovereign God says, I choose you for you to know me, trust me, and know that I am God. And I act and nobody can resist it.

Now go be my witnesses with this message. Let's read it. Make sure you see it.

Verse 10. You are my witnesses, declares the Lord. And my servant whom I have chosen so that you may know and believe me.

So you've been chosen by God if you're a believer for a purpose, namely to know him and believe him. But that's not all. And here's why you were chosen.

Understand what? That I am he. None before me. None after me.

And I act and nobody can reverse it. Now go. Tell them.

Tell them. Tell the children. Teach the children.

You're my witnesses. Teach your family. Teach your colleagues.

Tell it. It's an amazing word. This is verse 10.

You are my witnesses. And look at the end of verse 12. So you are my witnesses, declares the Lord.

I am God. Tell them that. Tell them that I am God.

Who is this? Just ordinary people. Chosen. Chosen people.

Israel in those days. The church of Jesus Christ in our day. Whoever bows before God and confesses him as Lord through Jesus Christ.

I have chosen you to know, to believe, to understand that I am he. Now go. You're my witnesses.

And what's the content of the witness? Three simple things and I close with these. One. Tell them as a witness.

There is no other God besides the God of the Bible. He is so God like there are no serious rivals. Verse 10.

At the end, I am God. Before me there is no God formed and there will be none after me. Then verse 12.

At the end, there is no strange God among you. So you are my witnesses, declares the Lord. And I am God.

Even from eternity, I am he. Go tell them. Tell them that.

So we're to educate that. We're to witness that. We're to proclaim that.

We're to write that. Speak that. Live that.

Tell them there's no other God. I have no competitors. Secondly, our witnesses that God is sovereign.

I'm basing that on the end of verse 13. Even from eternity, I am he. There is none who can deliver out of my hand.

I act. And who can reverse it? I'm sovereign. Go now.

Be my witnesses. Tell them that. Finally, third, we are to witness to this truth.

And this puts a little, no, a big twist on sovereignty. We are to witness to the truth that God is a savior. You see that in verse 11? A sovereign savior.

I, even I, am the Lord, and there is no savior beside me. So if you're using any kind of underlining, be sure you don't leave that word un-underlined. Because I know what's going on in this room right now for dozens of people.

You come out of backgrounds in which this word sovereignty or omnipotence, or maybe you attach a word like Calvinism to it, has no happy connections in your experience. Those kind of people were jerks. They were mean-spirited, or they were always arguing.

They didn't have any joy. They didn't care about soul winning. They didn't care about world missions.

All they did was care about dotting I's and crossing T's. And frankly, you don't want to have anything to do with this stuff that labors the sovereignty of God. And to me, it is the sweetest thing in the world.

Why would that be? What's wrong with me? And the reason, I think, and maybe I can just help begin to liberate you a little bit from associations and connections, so you get your feelings and your mind into a biblical frame, rather than letting it all be determined by your past experiences. One of the ways that I can do this in closing is to say, would you please connect the two words sovereign with Savior? Okay? Would you connect sovereign with Savior? You know, we're not about just riding the horse of generalized sovereignty, as though that's a neat thing. I want to be saved.

I don't want to just get converted in the sense that my sins are forgiven. I want to make sure that I start progressing in holiness, becoming more like Jesus, and that when temptations come and threats come and doubts come, I don't cave in and throw it all away, but rather persevere to the end and be saved in heaven forever and ever. That's what I want.

And I, if you tell me, well, you've got a free will, so do it with your free will. I think that's pretty fragile. That's really fragile, that that's going to get me to glory.

Rather, I want to say with the Bible, I will be their God and they will be my people, and I will write my law upon their hearts, and I will cause them to walk in my statutes. I will not turn away from doing good to them, and I will not let them turn away from me, but I will put the fear of God in their hearts so that they will not turn away from me. That's the salvation I've got to have, because left to my fickle self, I'm going to wake up an unbeliever someday and say, oh, cool, I've got a free will, I can now be an unbeliever.

If God doesn't lay hold on this rebel heart, prone to wonder, Lord, I feel it, I'm going to make shipwreck of my faith. Therefore, for me, the sweetness of sovereignty is the sweetness of making it to heaven. It's the sweetness of overcoming temptation.

It's the sweetness of escaping crying, clawing doubts that rise sometimes. My only hope is to say, God, save me, exert a powerful, aggressive influence on my will, so that I don't use it to leave you. It's precious.

It's precious beyond words, but we've got to find the words. I try. I try to preach it.

I try to write it. The reason I say we've got to find the words is because the Bible says, you're my witnesses. We don't have any choice.

You've got to say this. We've got to say this. Yes, it's offensive to some, but oh, if we could say it right, if we could, let's close like this, let's do this, let's leave this as the flavor of sovereignty this morning.

You know, I don't want you to leave this room today, go to work tomorrow, or go find some friend tonight, pull out your sovereignty sword and whack him over the head and say, Shepa, get your doctrine right. That's not what I want you to do. Here's what I want you to do.

I want you to go home, get out the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and let the whole counsel of God reveal a God to you who is a sovereign Savior to you, you sinner, you unworthy person, and so bask in the freedom of grace and the sovereignty of grace and the security of sovereign grace that you are so satisfied you don't need anything but God and are free to become a lowly servant to everybody you meet and not use them, but serve them, and then they might listen. What I would like to see happen is that we be so satisfied with the God that we see in the Bible that we don't need to hammer anybody with Him. We can serve people from Him.

And when they wonder why we can be so patient and so kind and so loving and return so much good for evil and labor morning, noon, and night to be good to them and not evil to them, they might say, what is the structure of your thought? What's in your heart? And then you might say, I love God who sovereignly saved me, sovereignly keeps me, sovereignly turns every tragedy in my life for good. And I would love to see you love my God. Lord, if we could educate our children to be like that, then we would grow generations of mighty oaks of righteousness that the world would benefit from.

And we want to bless the world, Lord. We know it's sinful. We know it's hell bound.

And we're not eager to get on our little podium and point our fingers at it and say, naughty world. We want to lay our lives down to save and to heal and to help. And we believe that you have chosen us, the text says, that we might know and believe and understand that you are God.

You act and none can reverse it. And when that grips our soul, then we can be humble, servant, joyful people. Lord, do this, I pray, as we leave.

Make us into that kind of people. Lord, receive our praise. Receive our blessing.

And now receive our humble trust and obedience all week long. And all the people said, Amen. You're dismissed.

Desiring God exists to help you make God your treasure, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

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