

(Education for Exultation) the Word Was God and Became Flesh

by John Piper

Jesus Christ is God, and believing this truth is essential for salvation and exaltation, but it also means facing controversy and disputation.

Duration: 36:19

Scripture: Isaiah 43:10-13, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Divine Sovereignty", "Gods Love"

Description

In this sermon, John Piper emphasizes the weightiness and glory of the words in the Gospel of John. He prays for the congregation to understand the significance of the message and the communion table. Piper highlights the eternal nature of God's love and mercy, and the incomprehensibility of His sovereignty. He also mentions that next week he will discuss the importance of the cross. The sermon focuses on the foundation of education for exultation in God, specifically highlighting the sovereignty of God as the starting point. Piper references Isaiah 43:10-13 to emphasize God's deity and His ability to act without anyone being able to reverse it.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.DesiringGod.org John chapter 1, verses 1 through 18. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There came a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify about the light.

So that all might believe through Him. He was not the light, but He came to testify about the light. There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.

He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God.

Even to those who believe in His name. Who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

And we saw His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified about Him and cried out saying, This was He of whom I said, He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me. For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.

For the law was given through Moses, grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time, the only begotten, who is in the bosom of the Father. He has explained Him.

Lord, there is a weightiness about these words as John begins his gospel that is so glorious and so needful in our chipper hearts. We need the weight of glory. America doesn't do much to help us feel the weight of glory.

Everything around us seems to be silly. Everything is a stick figure, a cartoon. Everything is light and fluffy.

Be happy. Lord, grant, I pray, that there would rest upon us now the weightiness of what we're about here in this message and in this service, this communion table. And before this text of Your Word, and before the vision of education for exaltation.

I pray for Your help now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

We began the last decade of the 20th century by building a building for exaltation. That's this building right here. Exaltation.

And God willing, we will begin the first decade of the 21st century by building a building for education. And that's the order of importance, but not the order of life. I say the order of importance.

First, exaltation and education. Second, in importance. The most important thing in the world for humans is that they exalt in God.

And as a means to that end, subordinately, it is also important that they be educated about God. But the order of preeminence is first exaltation, then education. In importance.

In preeminence. But that's not the order of life. The order of life goes like this.

True education precedes true exaltation. Learning truth precedes loving truth. Right reflection about God precedes right affections for God.

Seeing the glory of Christ precedes savoring the glory of Christ. Good theology precedes great doxology. That's the order of life.

So, on that little bookmark, you will notice when it says, in that little banner around the tree, education for exaltation, the little word for is out there significantly. We will teach our children and our youth and each other and anybody who will listen, for a reason, in order to bring something about. Education is never an end in itself.

Ever. Or it gets rotten, like the Dead Sea gets rotten because it's an end in itself. No fish live in the Dead Sea.

And no souls flourish in education when it's an end in itself. It's moving toward something and we say it is moving toward exaltation, last week, in God. So let me rehearse last week for just a minute.

A lot of you weren't here. This is an 11 part series on education for exaltation. And as I contemplated, where do you begin a series like this? The answer was obvious, you begin at the beginning.

You begin at the foundation and so we began with God. Education for exaltation in God. And we began at the bottom of God.

Namely, the sovereignty of God. And we took as our text, Isaiah 43, 10 to 13, which include these words. You are my witnesses, declares Yahweh.

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? And we took the words, I am God. And I act and who can reverse it? And said the two points are deity and sovereignty.

And they are not two points, they are one point. Because you can't be God if you're not sovereign. And you can't be sovereign if you're not God.

And so last point, last week was to lift up this truth that Yahweh is God. And God is sovereign or God is God. Now what do you add to that this week if you preach the second sermon in a series? And my answer is this, you add one short, huge truth.

Yahweh is God. God is sovereign. And today, Jesus is God.

That's today's point. Jesus is God. So let's go to our text.

Chapter 1 of John. And let's read again verses 1 to 3 to make our first of three observations. Number 1. The observation is Jesus Christ who is called the Word is the eternal God.

Jesus Christ who is called the Word is the eternal God. In the beginning was the Word. And the Word was with God and the Word was God.

He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him. And apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being.

Now the most important phrase in those verses is at the end of verse 1. The Word was God. We're going to see a name put on the Word when we get down to verses 14 and 17. But for now, let's just say the Word was God.

Then, verse 3 clarifies what it means to be God. What does it mean for the Word to be God? Verse 3 says, all things came into being through Him. Apart from Him, as if to clarify that first sentence and make sure we didn't miss it.

All things came into being through Him. And apart from Him, nothing came into being that has come into being. In other words, He didn't come into being.

All things that came into being, came into being through Him. Therefore, He did not come into being. Therefore, He is God.

That which has always been is God. That which came into being is not God. All that came into being, came into being through the Word of God.

Therefore, the Word of God did not come into being. Therefore, the Word is God. But it also says the Word was with God.

So the Word is not the Father. We'll be made clear in the subsequent verses. The Word is not the Father.

The Word is the Son. And so we have at least two pieces of this grand doctrine of the Trinity before us. The Word is God, and the Word is not the Father.

And so, you don't have much left to add. Sometimes people will say, well, the word Trinity doesn't occur in the Bible. Well, that's true.

But we're talking reality here. And a little reflection on John 1, 1-3 does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that if the Word is God, because everything that came into being, came into being through Him, and He is with God, then you have the Word who is God, and you have that with whom He was who is God, and two of the persons stand forth as the Trinity. The Holy Spirit comes later.

That's the first observation. Jesus Christ, who is called the Word, is the eternal God. Observation number two.

The Word became flesh. That is, God was united with the human nature in one person, and was truly man and truly God as the man Christ Jesus in history. The Word became flesh.

I get this from verse 14 and 17. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. And we saw His glory, glory as the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And then verse 17 puts the name on it. The law was given through Moses, grace and truth realized through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Word.

The Word is God. Therefore, Jesus Christ is God. And if you don't worship Jesus, you don't worship God.

And He became flesh. That's observation number two. I worship a man, the man Christ Jesus, who is God, over all, blessed forever.

Amen. Observation number three. If you receive Him as He really is, you become a child of God and the satisfied beneficiary of everlasting waves of grace.

Verses 12 and 16. Verse 12. As many as received Him, to them He gave right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.

And then I link verse 16 with that because of the word received, so that we'll really feel the force and glory of what it means to receive Christ, who is God. Verse 16. For of His fullness we have all received.

So if you've received Christ, you have received of His fullness grace upon grace. I call them waves, waves of grace. And I stuck in the word everlasting waves of grace.

Is there textual warrant for sticking in the word everlasting waves of grace, breaking over your life forever and ever and ever and ever without end? Is there warrant for that? Well, whose fullness are we talking about? What kind of fullness does it mean when it says fullness? It's the fullness of the word, and the word

was God, and therefore it's an infinite fullness, because it is what Paul called it in Colossians 2.9. All the fullness of deity dwells in Him bodily. It's the fullness of deity. So if you come to Him and you receive Him into your life, and as it says in Ephesians 3.14 and 15, He lives, the Christ of God, the word of God who is God, lives in you with all of His infinite fullness, you become the beneficiary of everlasting infinite waves of grace.

And I want to push it even farther than that, because if you meditate for just a moment on the word infinite, which He is if He's God, and then you contemplate the nature of the fullness that spills over onto you out of infiniteness, you can put away forever the fear that I had as a nine year old that heaven was going to be boring. I just thought, sameness, ooh, oh no, perfected in the twinkling of an eye, seeing as I have been seen and knowing as I am known, it's all over, nothing more to learn, nothing new of God to experience. It's boring, this little nine year old thought and scared of heaven, not as much as hell, but still scared that it was not going to be as good as blackie and baseball.

And now I've grown up a little bit, put away childish things, and I have meditated a while on the meaning of grace upon grace, breaking over my life out of the fullness of infinite deity forever. And I no longer think in terms of boredom because now I realize that I am finite. God is infinite.

A finite being cannot receive all at once the fullness of grace. Therefore, it's going to take how long to receive it? Forever, which means it's going to be new every morning. The steadfast love of the Lord and his mercies are going to be new every morning.

There will be a new delight, a new ecstasy, a new vista, a new glimpse, a new terrain of mountains to climb over every morning forever and ever and ever and ever. And that is incomprehensible as it ought to be because God is God and God is sovereign. And now I add Jesus in all of his fullness of grace is God.

Those are my three observations, and I do hope you will receive him. Now, next week, I'm going to talk about why he came, and the most important event in history, the cross. What I want to do for the rest of our few minutes this morning is to sober you up with regard to what it will mean in this church or your church if you take seriously what I have just said, preach it, teach it to your children, to your youth, and say it in a multicultural, pluralistic society.

What the cost will be. I want to tell you the cost. Because I have this notion that whenever you get into a vision process in a church leading toward a building, the idea kind of in the church is, all right, now I've got to get everybody happy, got to get everybody happy here, get everybody happy, exaltation, give a lot of money.

And I thought, you know, really the reality is this is scary. And we better say it so that people can leave now while the getting's good. And here's what I mean.

If you believe that Jesus Christ is God, and you draw out of that the implication of John, who wrote it, He who honors the Son honors the Father, and he who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father. He who has not the Son has not the Father. If you believe that, you will either be killed in some cultures, or deeply criticized in other cultures.

Why? 2 Timothy 4.3 The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. Acts 20, verse 30 From among your own selves the elders will arise, men speaking perverse things, trying to draw away the disciples after them. 1 John 4, 1 and 2 Beloved, don't believe every spirit that gone out into the world.

Test the spirits. By this we know the spirit of God. Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.

In other words, as soon as you begin to announce that Jesus is God, and not to have Jesus is not to have God, and not to honor him as God is not to honor God, a cleavage happens in the world, and often in churches, and the price will be very high. In our culture. Not just if you go and say it in Saudi Arabia, but if you say it here.

Give you an illustration. And I do this mainly to heighten the stakes of those who will be around in education for exaltation. I could wish, oh how I could wish we could move always directly from education to exaltation.

Wouldn't it be great without the intervening disputation, controversy. Why is it that we have to move from education, often through the shark infested waters of disputation, on the way to exaltation. Because it can become so easily perceived that on the way what you really love is disputation.

It's not what we love. I long for the day when this will be gone. It will be over.

There will be no disputation. No controversy. No arguments.

No heresies. No false teaching in heaven. I'll be corrected.

Everybody will be fixed. And we will be one mind completely. And there will be exaltation and learning and exaltation and learning and exaltation forever and ever with no intervening step of controversy.

But here it won't happen. And if you try to make it happen. If you say I'm not going to be a part of that.

Our church is just going to go straight from education to exaltation. And we're not going to be a part of controversies. You may last one generation or two.

It's cheap to let everybody else do the dirty work and preserve the precious truth on which you stand. And it won't last. It won't last.

Every one of Paul's letters is called forth by disputation. We wouldn't even have a New Testament if people acted that way. So here's my illustration.

Last September, as most of you know, the Southern Baptists called for prayer that Jewish people would believe in Jesus as their Messiah and be saved. And did that ever hit the fan? Editorials in all the leading newspapers. Controversy everywhere.

So I, in response to the lead editorial in the Tribune, wrote a counterpoint for the Tribune. Never dreaming they'd publish it. Because they never have published any letter I've written in 25 years.

And they published it. Every word of it. So let me read one of the paragraphs.

According to the New Testament, Jesus is the fulfillment of all the hopes of Israel. He is the yes to all God's promises. He is the Messiah.

To reject Him is to reject God the Father. And to confess Him as Lord of your life is to be reconciled to God. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father.

The one who confesses the Son has the Father also. Even though it is perceived as offensive by many Jewish people, the call for prayer that Israel should believe on her Messiah is a profoundly loving act. For he who has the Son has life, and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.

Well, they printed it. And the response was significant. The Tribune received a letter from four clergymen, three Protestant, one Catholic, of major churches in the cities here to this effect.

And I'll just read one of the paragraphs. They printed part of it, not all of it. The Reverend Piper claims that the appeal to pray that Jewish people accept Jesus as their Messiah is a profoundly loving act.

But genuine love does not harbor the kind of aggressive agenda that is implicit in visions of Christianizing the world. Love, including the agape that lies at the heart of the Christian gospel, is more respectful and less intrusive, more open and less controlling than that. Unfortunately, arrogant is the right word to describe any attempts at proselytizing.

In this case, the effort of Christians to win over their Jewish brothers and sisters. Thoughtful Christians will dissociate themselves from any such effort. Close quote.

Now, the saddest thing about that quote is not that it puts you and me, at least if you were among the ameners so far, not that it puts you and me in the category of unthinking, unloving and arrogant. Those three words. You are unthinking because thoughtful Christians dissociate themselves from churches like this.

And you are unloving because love doesn't harbor that kind of Christianizing agenda. And you are arrogant because that's the only word that can describe proselytizing efforts that tries to win Jews to be Christians. So you're unloving and you're arrogant and you're unthinking.

Now, the saddest thing is not that that's true. We can handle that. That's good for us, probably.

To hear criticism, to search our hearts, to see whether these things are so, to humble ourselves, to test all things, that's okay. We can handle that. The saddest thing is that these are four shepherds of four huge churches leading Christian congregations away from the uniqueness of Jesus as essential for salvation.

That's the sad thing. And they're all over the country. So let's be very clear as we move towards education for exaltation.

We love exaltation, do we not? I love worship. These are the high days for me. When we gathered at the breakfast table this morning and I bowed in prayer with the family, I just heard coming out of my mouth, Lord, I love the Lord's day.

I love the Lord's day. I get to go worship at Bethlehem. What a treat.

I love exaltation. And I know it's always in jeopardy and could be lost so quickly and so easily. Paul said, I am in prison for the defense and confirmation of the gospel.

Defense and confirmation. Not just celebration. Defense and confirmation of the gospel.

So God is sovereign, we said. Now Jesus is God. And that tremendous implication, if you don't have Jesus, you don't have God.

So in the coming weeks, as you see this little brown thing in your Bible, and you see education for exaltation and you remember this sermon. Oh, not just education for exaltation in God, but education for exaltation in Jesus, who is God. You can write on the back here.

Yahweh is God. God is sovereign. Jesus is God.

And God help us when the trouble comes to remain meek. I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. George Otis said, Jesus never called his people to a fair fight.

Ever. Don't stomp your feet when language is manipulated against you. And emotions are used to blackmail you.

Don't stomp your feet and say, that can't be, that can't be, this is America. Well, so what? Of course it can be, and of course it will be. This is the world.

And the world lies under the darkness of Satan. And our own flesh is cropping up all the time with false ideas and rebellion. So we add, God help us.

One last word from John Owen. So helpful. I love John Owen.

I love lots of people. They help me so much. Oh, my.

Most of them are dead. But I love them anyway. When we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for, then we will be garrisoned by the grace of God against all the assaults of men.

You see that little phrase? There's the key. When we have communion with God in the doctrine we contend for, oh, brothers and sisters, if there's a doctrine like Jesus is God that's worth contending for, don't make it mainly something that you contend for, but mainly something through which you commune with the living God. Because if that's not the main thing that's happening to you, all your contending will go awry.

All your contending will be arrogant. There will be more self in your argumentation than God if you're not humbly drinking of the fountain of Jesus who is God and thus full of grace, thus satisfying all your broken heart. There will be a flavor about the contention and the disputation if you are communing with God through Jesus Christ when you celebrate Him.

And by all means, let us celebrate Him. Let me remind you of how right Charles Wesley got it. Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise, the glories of my what? God.

That's no accident that he said God. My Redeemer is my God. My gracious Master and my what? God.

I'll be here at the front to pray with any of you who'd like to pray. You're dismissed. Thank you for listening to this message by John Piper, pastor for preaching at Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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