

Gravity and Gladness on Sunday Morning - Lesson 3b

by John Piper

God's aim in the universe is to be known and enjoyed by his creatures, and corporate worship is essential for displaying God's glory.

Duration: 36:55

Scripture: Ezra 7:10, Psalm 1:2, Luke 4:18-19, Luke 4:21, Luke 4:24-30

Topics: "Expository Preaching", "Corporate Worship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of expository preaching, which involves explaining and making clear the message of the inspired book of God. He believes that preaching should be a moment of worship for both the preacher and the congregation, with the energy and affections of the listeners ascending Godward. The preacher also discusses the normative nature of regular corporate seasons of worship and the need for authentic and intense affections in supplication, thanks, and praise to honor God. He acknowledges the challenges of remaining vigilant in one's spiritual life, as Satan, the world, and our own flesh can dull our vision of God.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God Ministries is available at www.desiringgod.org Here's my second argument. We have seen already in this course that God's aim in the universe is to be known and enjoyed by his creatures and thus to be shown more glorious than any other reality.

Corporate worship is one essential way that God designs for this display of his glory to be expressed in the world and in anticipation of the final perfect worship of the age to come. So, saying that the essence of worship is a satisfaction in God in the heart doesn't mean that it should just stay hidden in the heart. It should be displayed first in all of life in the way you live your life but also in corporate expressions of satisfied saints giving expression and voice to their delight in God or their grief over not having delighted in God.

And when you do it together in a gathering, it displays something more of God than if you just did it by yourself. There's something more beautiful seen when diverse people get together in one room under one Christ with one corporate collective, yes, and I love you to God than if they just all go out into their little

pockets in the woods all by themselves and say, yes, I love you God. That's good.

That's good to do that by yourself. But if you don't unite with the people of God regularly to corporately say, yes, we love you then God doesn't get all the glory in this fallen world that he's supposed to get. Third, corporate unified supplication, thanks, praise displays more of the glory of God than individual acts of supplication, thanks and praise because harmony in diversity is intrinsically more beautiful than mere unison.

Harmony in diversity is intrinsically more glorious, more beautiful than mere unison singing. Which means that when a group of diverse people, not thinking mainly here about singing, just using that as an analogy, they get together and you come from many different backgrounds. There are many ages, many socioeconomic strata represented many different tastes and somehow a couple thousand people can come with one heart and one mind before one God and say one corporate collective praise you, something glorious of God is revealed at that moment.

And that's why worship becomes so important at the corporate level. Harmony in diversity requires more grace from God to bring it about among sinful people who by nature are selfish and want their own way rather than deferring to others in love. So those are three observations under point one point one.

The first thesis was that regular corporate seasons of worship are normative. And then I gave three observations as to why I thought that was the case. Here's the second thesis.

Supplication, thanks and praise will honor God in proportion to the intensity and authenticity of the affections responding to the truth of God and his ways. There is such a thing as hypocrisy and a mere form of godliness. They are deadly and no honor to God.

This is thesis number two, and I can't remember why it's thesis number two. That may be what I'm thinking, because that is coming. Is that in the getting together, this intensity and authenticity can be heightened by togetherness.

In the real world, this is thesis number three. In the real world of ordinary Christians, the pursuit of satisfaction in God through supplication, thanks and praise do not usually arise in the hearts of God's people without being stirred up in some way when they come together. So that's the point Bob was saying that one of the functions of corporate gatherings is that even though heartfelt satisfaction in God is the essence of worship, most of us languish in that.

Most of us need help with that. Most of us need to be around other people who are like that so that it flourishes and is kindled and awakened. That is, the average Christian does not come to worship service filled with joy in God and ready to overflow.

There are at least three reasons for this. All right. Here are the reasons why I think we were talking here, a friend from Ohio last night and I, about one of the reasons we say it would be great if people came to worship to give.

One of the reasons pastors say that is because what they really mean, what they want to happen, is that our people are so in deep, profound communion with God during the week or on Saturday night or Sunday morning that they come spilling over in praise and joy and satisfaction. That's what they really mean. And the reality is almost nobody comes to church that way.

A few do. And it's wonderful. They're ready to engage God.

But most come hungry or feel wrongly. And we need to help them get the crud out and help them begin to desire. Now why? Why is that? Why is that the case? And I wrote three things here.

Our own remaining corruption and sin, the world system in which we live and Satan himself, all work to blur our sight and dull our affections of spiritual reality. So Satan, the world and our own flesh are constantly dulling our vision of God. No, it can creep up on a pastor just like everybody else.

Just creep daily upon you. You begin to just slack off in some of your vigilance. You're not praying as much.

You're not meditating as much. And suddenly you wake up to the fact, I'm hardly thinking about God these days. I'm hardly getting any delight from God these days.

I'm just all consumed in this computer switch. You're all consumed in this deal at home or this problem. That is a creeping, dangerous, horrible reality.

It's true for all of us. And worship services once, twice, three times a week are one way by which we're awakened to God again. For the sake of delighting in him, God designs for us to live on the word of God in a continual way.

For the sake of the effect it has on our affections. In other words, in this world, it is normal to go backward without continual exposure to the word of God, awakening in us the spiritual affections God deserves from us. And I'm taking for granted in that paragraph that we need help from others and not just from our Bibles.

Yes, personal devotions are important, but God has ordained, and we'll get to this in a minute, that there be preachers and teachers and friends who both preach to us, teach to us, and exhort one another every day as long as it is called today, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief leading you to fall away from the living God. We need the word of God, not just from a book in our private devotions. We need it spoken to us, heralded to us, driven into us, exhorted and admonished into us.

And so these gatherings, both in small group and in worship services with preaching at the center, are very crucial in view of the fact that our affections depend on that kind of input. And this is not any other way than God designed it. You read the epistles and you know he has designed this one another work and he has appointed pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints to do the work of the ministry.

And pastors and teachers mainly do it through speaking the truth in love, through preaching and teaching. Number three, this is the third reason why people don't flourish on their own in relation to God, but need to come together to flourish towards God and delight in God. Reason number three, God also designs that some of this continual exposure to the word of God be provided by leaders in the church whose calling it is to make truth known to the people and to be examples of Godward affection for them.

Thus, it is not only a sign of weakness, but of God's appointed will that the spiritual life of people depend in some measure on the regular gathering for exposure to these leaders work, such as making explicit what was implicit in number two here. We are weak. We are weak.

We need input and help for our fire of love to God to be kindled. But it's not just a desperate act of weakness. God has designed the body so that there are people with different gifts.

When you gather together, those gifts become useful in strengthening our affections for God. So this is number three, is that we come together and they are normative. It's normative to come together because the way we are wired makes it fitting and right and necessary that we meet to awaken each other's affections for God and strengthen them and deepen them.

Thesis number four, therefore, essential to corporate seasons, to a corporate season of worship, of thanksgiving, of supplication, thanks and praise is a fresh declaration of truth about God and a fresh demonstration of affection for God. You can see I'm moving toward preaching here. It's essential that in that service or whatever you want to call it, that togetherness, where the people of God come together, there be a fresh declaration of truth about God and a fresh demonstration of affection for God.

This is true not only because ordinary Christians need to be exposed to truth and awakened afresh to its value in order to respond authentically and intensely, but also because the declaration of God's truth and the demonstration of its value with appropriate affections is worship. It's not just trying to awaken worship, it is worship. That is, it displays the value of God in that it shows he is worth knowing and proclaiming and feeling strongly about.

Thus, it would be misleading to think of the declaration of God's truth and the demonstration of affection for God as preparation for worship. I do not regard preaching mainly as a preparation for worship, but an act of worship. It does awaken worship, but it is worship and should always be seen that way.

I call preaching expository exultation. This is Thesis 5. This fresh declaration of truth about God and fresh demonstration of affection for God honor God most and help people honor him best when they happen in the same act called preaching. Rather than being separated into instruction and inspiration.

I think when a pastor thinks of his contribution as, I instruct the head and the worship leader through music kindles the affections. That's very bad. That's a bad way to look at it, I think.

I think preaching should teach and inspire and music should teach and inspire. The text of the worship songs and the hymns are crucial and the affections of the preacher are crucial. If these are separated, a false message is sent to the people, namely, that truth about God is not the key to spiritual awakening, but rather that some other avenue to the heart must be found, like bouncy music or great music.

It would also send the misleading message that inspiration can rightly awaken the affections without a biblical vision of God functioning as the basis of those awakened affections. So you can make a mistake in either direction. So I'm arguing here that at the center of the gatherings should be a fresh declaration of truth and a fresh exaltation over that truth and its value.

And I'm saying that preaching is the kind of communication that combines those two things into one. Expository exaltation. It has the head dimension and the heart dimension.

We've often thought of preaching as our kind of focus. I think that's an unfortunate dichotomy. If you thought through what you mean by focus, I think if you just took that without any qualification, it would produce boring preaching.

Because it would be communicating to the pastor, you don't really have to be modeling worship in the declaration of this focus. All you have to do is be clear in your explanation of the God you're describing. And clarity and precision and accurate exegesis and exposition become then the substance of it.

Whereas I think the preacher in his focusing of the people is responding to the God he sees as he focuses. And that response should produce a kind of energy, a kind of brokenness in his own heart, a kind of excitement with grace, a kind of zeal and boldness for the promises of God. All those responsive elements to the thing focused on shouldn't wait.

Preaching in its very nature should be a responsive focusing and a focused responsiveness. And then when you get to the music, however you line them up here, some before, after, middle, whatever, that music should also be a focusing so that there's integrity to the theology of the songs and the hymns and a responsiveness about them. So, yeah, I hear what Tozer is saying there.

And I do want to massage it a little bit and say, let us pastors think differently about preaching than that. Let's see what thesis six is here. Let's get more, more specifically biblical about warranting what I've just said about preaching.

There is biblical evidence from the time of Ezra to Jesus, to the synagogue, to the beginnings of the Christian church, that corporate worship included preaching. Let me give you a few texts. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered.

Amen. Amen. Lifting up their hands, they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord.

So here's a worship gathering. They worship the Lord with their faces to the ground. Also, Jeshua, Bani, Cherubiah, Jamin, Akub, Shabbatai, Hodiah, Messiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozebed, Hanan, Peliah, the Levites helped the people to understand the law while the people remained in their places.

And they read from the book, from the book of the law, from the law of God. Clearly, they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. So the least we can say here is that there were times in the Old Testament when in worship settings, the Levites, the appointed people, would open the book.

People didn't have books. They didn't have printing presses. To have a scroll was precious beyond all imagining.

And so the people got it orally, and he read to them, and then they gave the sense and explained. And so there's that focusing, explanatory, expository dimension in the context of worship. That's Nehemiah.

Now, here's the situation in Jesus' time as he comes to Nazareth, where he'd been brought up. He went to the synagogue, Luke 4, 16 to 21, on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah.

He opened the book and found the place. Now, picture this. This is Sunday or Sabbath, Saturday in the Jewish situation.

And there's a gathering. There's a meeting. And Jesus comes to it and he stands to read and they give him the book.

And so there's a book that's read. It's the Old Testament. And then he's going to unpack the book when he's done.

Just showing you that this tradition of a worship setting with some words at the center and then some exposition is here in the Bible. There was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written.

The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovering a sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book and gave it back to the attendant.

And he sat down and the eyes of all the synagogue were on him. And he began to say to them. And then he gave his little sermon.

Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing. And he goes on and preaches. He talks about the widow.

He talks about the leper, the Old Testament. And then they are so angry at what he says. They take him out, try to throw him off a cliff.

So the point here is simply to show you that that's the way in Jesus lifetime worship services were happening. They were on a Sunday. They had a word at the center.

The person read the word and then they sat down instead of standing up. Interestingly, stood to read, sat to preach. Well, that would change things in a worship service, wouldn't it? And then he gave his message of unfolding or application or exposition.

Now, here in the book of Acts, you find this word. Moses from ancient generations, Acts 15, 21. Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him.

Those who preach him. Now, there's a statement that for generations and universally Jewish people gathered in synagogues where preaching of the Mosaic law was an essential component. The reason I point this out is simply that the church grew out of these synagogues.

This is where they came from. As Paul went and did on his missionary journeys, he he preached first to the Jews and he found the synagogue if he could find it and he preached. And if you get some converts there, he formed a little church out of them.

Now, what would they do? They would probably begin by doing it pretty much the way they had done it in the synagogue as far as putting the word at the center. So you get Paul going into a synagogue, going on from Perga. They arrived at Pasidian, Acts 13, 14, Pasidian Antioch.

And on the Sabbath day, they went into the synagogue and sat down. And after reading the law of the prophets, the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation, say it. Paul stood up and motioning with his hand said, and then he preached for the next 20 some verses in Acts 13.

So the law is read in the synagogue. There's a guest there. They let him take the word of exhortation and the sermon is preached.

And then you have Paul in Colossians 128 saying this. We proclaim Christ. We proclaim him admonishing every man, teaching every man with all wisdom so that we may present every man complete in Christ.

This word proclaim here is the word I chose this text for because that's the word for announce. It's not just teach. And I wanted you to see that it applies to Christians, not just unbelievers on a street corner, but there is a proclaiming dimension.

There's a heralding dimension to all the saints so that they be made complete in Christ. Romans 115. So for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you Christians also who are in Rome.

So on the basis of those texts, I'm inferring that in the gathered assembly of Christians for worship, the word read and then preached or proclaimed and explained was very probably right at the center of life. Now, here's a more explicit command from Second Timothy three and four. Before we read the last thesis here.

All scriptures inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training and righteousness so that the man of God may be equipped, adequate, equipped for every good work. I solemnly charge you, Timothy, in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by his appearing in his kingdom, preach the word. Now he's talking to Timothy.

This is the word preach. Caruso. It's not the word teach.

It's the word preach heralding. It's what it's what a town crier does. Hear ye.

Hear ye. Hear ye. The king has a message for all of his subjects.

If you appear at this town, such and such a place, you will be given amnesty. So that's the preaching of the gospel. Now, when you when you're done with that, somebody might raise a hand, say, excuse me, what's an amnesty? And then you have to explain, well, you can do that as part of the heralding and then it becomes preaching and teaching, which is what good preaching is.

Good preaching is a heralding. It's a hear ye. Hear ye.

Thus saith the Lord on this Sunday morning. And it is an explanation as you go along of anything that that your listeners, you think, may not get. So tomorrow morning in this place, we're going to have twenty three hundred people here, probably.

Because all of you are going to bring unbelievers with you if you're members of this church and this room will have people in it and that room will have it be a TV monitor right here. And my job for about twenty five or thirty minutes will be to say to all those unbelievers, plus our people on this special outreach service. Hear ye.

Hear ye. God in heaven has a word for you this morning. And I know in my head that a lot of those people are unchurched people.

They don't know what the word justification means or sanctification or redemption or propitiation or any of these jargon words that I love. And therefore, part of my preaching job tomorrow will be to try to get inside those heads out there and find language that will be intelligible. Preach the word is a command to Timothy, and Timothy was the pastor of the church in Ephesus.

And I think this is in the context of saints being equipped for every good work. Preach the word so that you'll equip the saints for every good work by using the word. And then he continues.

Be ready in season and out of season. Funerals come on out of season times. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction for the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but wanting to have their ears tickled.

They will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance with their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myth. That unit right there, I think, is one of the clearest, strongest commands that preaching be a part of the life of a church, because this preach the word is not mainly evangelism here. This is mainly in the context of the word of God, strengthening the people of God and guarding them from false teaching and error.

This is number seven. Therefore, preaching as worship. Or preaching as expository exaltation is a normative element in worship services, at least some worship services.

I wouldn't argue that it has to be there, for example, in a small group. A small group doesn't have to have preaching the same way that a larger service might. But somewhere, I mean, suppose you're a pastor of a church with, say, 25 people.

This is why, Bob, my invitation to come to be with your group on Sunday night was such a help to me. Bob, once a month or so, is it once a month? Every other month. If you know of anybody who has a severe reaction to chemicals and can't survive in most sanctuaries where they have all kinds of carpet and paint and stuff.

Bob gathers people in his cleanse home and they have a little worship time on Sunday evening. And they asked me to come there and speak. Now, I usually preach to, you know, 18, 1900 people on Sunday morning.

And that calls for a certain kind of, you know, projection. Well, here I am with 12 people the other night. And I thought to myself, now, how do you do this? If I were the pastor of a church in Sigiri, Guinea, and there were 12 people, would I do what I do on Sunday morning? Well, yes and no.

You wouldn't project with the same force and loudness if you've got a little group in a small room. But I found myself, Bob, sitting on that chair, coming to the edge of my chair and bouncing a little bit on the edge of the chair as I spoke this word. In other words, there is a preaching dimension to teaching, even when there's just 12 people there.

Because if you're stirred by what you're saying, if you love the God you're announcing, and you love salvation, and you love heaven, and you love grace, and you love forgiveness, and you love reconciliation, it begins to express itself in certain ways of emotion and passion that I call preaching. Expository exaltation. It can be done with 20 and it can be done with 2,000.

And it can be done with 20,000. And the form will just alter a little bit. I don't know if you've ever listened to Alexander Scorby read the Bible on tape.

If you don't have Bible tapes and you can ride in the car and listen to tapes, buy the Bible on tape. And I frankly, even though the King James is hardly used by anybody today, that's what Alexander Scorby read. I wouldn't trade Alexander Scorby's reading of the Bible on tape for anybody's reading, including all the thunder and shaking that they put on tapes nowadays.

I don't find that very helpful to have all the sound effects and dramatic effects. To me, that's just a distraction. But the reason Scorby is a model Bible reader is because without changing... I mean, here he is.

He's probably reading in a microphone in a studio somewhere. And without changing the decibels of his voice very much, you can actually hear by the way he reads it when the crowds are shouting, crucify him, crucify him. And you can hear God whispering with a still, small voice.

And he uses his voice in such a marvelous way that you can hear the shout, although he's not shouting, and you can hear the whisper, though he doesn't drop too low for it to come through the tape. And preachers need to work at that so that whether you're in a small group, little house church or a big group, there can be appropriate modulations of the voice or whatever it takes so that the affection of crucify him, crucify him, and the still, small voice comes through. This way of warranting preaching in worship will have profound effects on how the preacher pursues the preparation and execution of his work.

In other words, if you believe that being expository because you're dealing with an inspired book that has to be explained and made clear and a message clearly announced, and you believe in exaltation in the very act of doing it because it is so glorious, this truth, that if it didn't have an echo in the emotion of the preacher, it would be a self-contradiction, then that's going to affect the way you prepare to preach and the way you teach your people will listen and how you view that whole transaction. I view the 30 to 40 minutes that I preach on Sunday morning as a high moment of worship for me and for our people. I expect that the energy that's happening in that transaction is very Godward, and that people's affections as they're listening are ascending Godward.

The inside, and I wish more outside. I could use a few more mm-hmms or amens. I mean, to get no feedback from a people is very strange.

I'll tell you, it is very strange. Now Bethlehem, thank you. And I won't say thank you if it just becomes normative.

I mean, it can, of course, get out of hand, and that's probably what everybody's scared of, but frankly, we're not in danger, we're not in danger of it getting out of hand at Bethlehem. And there are ways to do it with a nod, with a smile, with a mm-hmm, or with periodic yes and amen. What? Thank you.

Okay, end of number three. That was an argument for the fact that from the nature of Christian living and the nature of human heart and the nature of God, plus some pattern that we see in the Bible, that there should be services of worship, and that preaching should be a part of them. So much more could be said there.

I know I'm, that's, a much stronger case could be made than what I've just made, but that's all I'm going to say about it because I want to really get into the nature of it. Questions at that point about anything? Have you found a text that indicates regular expository preaching and teaching? Not explicitly. Anybody know of one? A text that says regular expository preaching or teaching or explaining of the law was commanded in the Old Testament.

You sure have pointers, I think, in that not only do you have Ezra explaining the law once, but you have those Psalms where he delight in the law of the Lord and meditate on it day and night. Now, can that happen without books? Got no books, no printing press, no scrolls. People don't have any access to written word of God.

How is that going to happen if they're not being regularly fed what they can meditate on? So, I think by implication, there probably was a lot of word sharing going on as soon as Moses came on the scene.

Other question or comment on that? Absolutely. That's good.

Right. That's real good to be reminded about the household worship and the father's responsibility especially to teach his children the word of God. I'm looking at the clock.

This is probably the best place to break rather than start a new unit. So, let's take about a five or seven minute break here and then we'll come back and move on to the next one. in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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