

# The Devil Can Do Exposition, but He Can't Preach

by John Piper

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*This sermon emphasizes the importance of preaching that awakens worship, focusing on the inner essence of worship as experiencing Christ as a more satisfying treasure than everything in life or death. It highlights the unique nature of Christian preaching as a blend of bringing good news with divine authority, making clear the meaning of biblical texts, and exulting in the glories of God to draw others into worship.*

**Scripture:** Luke 2:10, Philippians 1:20, Hebrews 2:14, 2 Timothy 4:2, Colossians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 2:4, Romans 10:14, Ephesians 3:8, 1 Peter 4:11, Psalm 119:162

**Topics:** "Awakening Worship", "Experiencing Christ as Treasure"

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## Description

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## Transcript

Father come please and grant us fullness of truth and fullness of the Holy Spirit and faithfulness to your Word and a prophetic anointing that penetrates to exactly what these folks need at this time. Don't leave us to ourselves and our flesh or our preparation. Unless the Lord build the house, those who build it labor in vain.

Unless the Lord watch over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. Unless the Lord preach the sermon, the preacher preaches in vain. So come, I ask in the name of Jesus, amen.

So for 33 years I was preaching regularly at Bethlehem Baptist Church and I resisted with all my might any language that would divide the service into one part worship and one part preaching. I absolutely would not allow that kind of talk. In one part of the service we worshipped with song and prayer and confession and acclamation and in the other part we worshipped over the word in preaching and hearing preaching.

So no talk about we do worship in one part and we preach or teach in the other part. No. Okay, so that's the point of this seminar, to persuade you that preaching, if it's Christian, biblical, is and awakens worship.

Okay, that's where we're going, which meant that the aim of my exposition of the book in the sermon for those 33 years was to fuel me first and set my heart aflame with the glories of God revealed in the text of this book so that I, as I opened those glories through the text, could draw other people in to my experience of God. That's preaching in my understanding of what it is. The aim of preaching was only secondarily to keep their marriages together, or to make them bold in witness, or to make them fervent in prayer, or to release them into God-centered living and mission, or to grow the church, or to meet the budget.

All of those things were secondary. Now, I totally believe, I mean, I was a pastor. I wanted their marriages to stay together.

I wanted them to be a praying people. I wanted them to boldly witness. I can't win everybody to Jesus.

They gotta talk about Jesus. I wanted them to be involved in missions. I wanted them to be sacrificial in their giving.

I wanted the church to grow. Some pastors, however, feel the burden and the urgency of all those practical things so deeply that they switcheroo and begin subtly or blatantly to make those the primary aim of preaching, failing to realize if this church is not thrilled with the God of this book, the soil in which those things grow won't be there. And over time, you may think you're doing a little in-run around worship over the Word to get more practical.

It's gonna backfire. So, yes, to change lives. Not that way.

I think those things and a hundred other practical fruits of righteousness that grow in the Christian life grow in the soil of worship. So my primary task was to lay open texts in such a way that the meaning of the author could be understood and the reality in the meaning, the reality of God and Christ and salvation in the meaning could be displayed so that I and they could exalt in that meaning, in that reality. So you can hear two pieces to that, I hope.

I call it the title of the book, expository. Make it plain. Make it plain.

These are not your ideas. I don't give a rib about your ideas, preacher. I want to know what's in this book.

Make this plain. I call that exposition. Get into the text, show the clauses and the words, how they work, how they make the point, and then go through it to reality.

So you're not playing games grammatically. Get to the reality and then, do you see it? Do you feel it? Is it meaningful to you? Are you blown away by it, pastor? Do they see that? So expository exaltation. That's what I call Christian preaching.

And there's a, we're gonna get to, I'm gonna define worship in a minute. I've been kind of assuming it all morning, but we really need to do some exegetical work to define what worship is. But before we get there, when I say that we are to exalt over the reality coming through text from the Bible, I have in mind a kind of proportional emotional response to the text, to the reality in the text, and the the proportion has to do with the kind of reality that we see there.

So if it's a, if it's a heavy reality that this text just opened, you're not light-hearted. If it's a terrifying reality, you're not chipper. If it's a tender reality, you're not harsh.

If it's a harsh reality, you're not tender. And on and on. I'm talking about a proportional, appropriate, affectional experience of the reality that you've just opened for the people.

If you handle the majesties of God with the same casual demeanor you used when you told the illustration about your cat, you're out of touch with the reality. And you know, over time, the people are gonna know this. You can fool unspiritual people forever.

You can't fool Christians. I'm talking about people who have the Holy Spirit and are walking into your service with the living God in them, expecting to hear his word dealt out with exaltation that corresponds to the nature of the reality you've just opened in the text. They know, they know whether you are in touch.

Don't fake it. You just quit the ministry if all you can do is fake it. There are actors in the pulpit.

They can pull it off for a long time because they grow a church of unspiritual people, and unspiritual people are deceivable. Spiritual people are gonna just drift away from that church. It'll grow like crazy.

But the real Christians are down the street in a little church where the man's real. He's real. He walks in there from the closet with God and the aroma of Jesus is on him.

They can smell it. So would you, if you have any, I'm gonna have you raise your hand here to get ready for this. I want to know if you have any responsibility that is, if you're part of the preaching team at your church or do all of it.

Would you raise your hand? I just want to know how many preachers I'm looking at. Thank you. I'm talking to you mainly.

The others, you're fine to be here. That's okay. But I'm talking to you.

Here's where we're going in the 35 minutes we have left. I'm gonna try to define the inner essence of worship, and then I'm going to make the connection to show why biblical preaching aims at that and is that. Okay, that's the outline.

What is the inner essence of worship and then preaching? Why do you say that's the main, ultimate aim, and in the aiming it is that? Okay, that's where we're going. Those are the three pieces. Let's define the inner essence of worship, and the reason I'm talking about inner essence and not the totality of what worship is, is because the New Testament, unlike the Old Testament, is stunningly, stunningly silent about the external dimension of worship.

Incredible! I mean, compared to the Old Testament where everything down to the color of the threads, they specified the New Testament is like blank. There's a reason for that. Here's my guess at why that is.

The New Testament, the Old Testament religion is a come-see religion, okay? The Queen of Sheba, come on up here and see the glories of Solomon. We don't do that as Christians. We don't say come see our big building.

The New Testament religion is a go-tell religion. You go to all the cultures and all the peoples of the world, and you take this book and you incarnate there. Thousands of cultures.

One book. Really? Yes. Yes.

Right. How can that be? Because you read the New Testament. It doesn't tell you whether to worship in a building or under a tree.

It doesn't tell you whether you use two songs or ten songs. It doesn't tell you whether you have worship leaders or don't have worship leaders. It doesn't say whether you have instruments or no instruments, let alone what kind of instruments.

It doesn't tell you whether you have a 30-minute service or a five-hour service. It doesn't tell you whether to sing before, in the middle, or after the preaching. It doesn't tell you whether you have standing, sitting, lying, whether babies can be present or not, whether pulpits should be used or not.

What is this? You know, it's not in the Bible. I'm thankful for it. I have notes I can't do, Spurgeon.

It doesn't tell you to wear this or be like MacArthur did. It's silent. There's a reason, because you all live in different cultures, even in America, right? In America, we're just all over the map on how we do this thing called worship.

I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about what has to happen in here for that to be real. Because Jesus said, this people honors me with their lips and praises and songs and prayers and confessions, and their heart is far from me.

In vain do they worship me. Zero. I count that worship as zero.

I'm not interested in zero. I want to know what has to happen in here for that to be real. That's what I'm trying to define.

Calvin and Luther got this. I'll read this quote from Calvin. I have reformed people go crazy because they didn't think he said this.

Listen to this. The Master did not... I'm one of those reformed people, by the way. Like, I have seven points of Calvin.

The Master did not will in outward discipline... I'm talking about Jesus. The Master did not will in outward discipline and ceremonies to prescribe in detail what we ought to do, because he foresaw that this depended on the state of the times, and he did not deem one form suitable for all ages, because he taught nothing specifically about that, and because these things are not necessary to salvation, and for the building of the church ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age. It will be fitting, as the advantage of the church will require, to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones.

Indeed, I admit that we ought not to charge into innovation rashly, suddenly, for insufficient cause, but love will best judge what may hurt or edify if we will let love be our guide. All will be safe. That's Institutes, Book 4, Section 10, Paragraph 30.

Can you believe that kind of flexibility of a regulatory principle Calvinist called John Calvin? Luther typically... Listen to Luther. The worship of God should be free at table, in private rooms, downstairs, upstairs, at home, abroad, in all places, by all people, at all times, and whoever tells you anything else is lying as badly as a Pope and the devil himself. That's Luther, that's his vintage Luther, and true.

Now one text crystallized for me the inner essence of worship more than any other, and if you have a Bible and you want to look at it, Philippians chapter 1, verses 20 and 23. They're gonna really streamline this, but I hope it will be compelling. I hope you will see it in the text.

If you don't see it in the text, then my foundation is not going to be there, because what Piper says does not matter regarding the inner essence of worship. What Paul says, what the Psalms say, what God says matters infinitely. So Philippians 1, 20.

It is my eager expectation and hope that, skipping a few words, Christ will be honored, magnified, that Christ will be magnified, glorified, honored, that Christ will be worshipped, honored, magnified. I'm assuming that to magnify, magnify Christ in your life is to worship Christ, so I think this is a good text for what I'm after. Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death.

So this text is really about Paul's eager expectation and hope that Christ will be worshipped in his body, whether by life or by death, and then he gives the basis for that hope. How will that happen? When will that happen? What's the basis of that happening in you? You say that's what you're after. That's surely what I'm after.

That's the goal of my life. I want Christ to be magnified in a 72-year-old body, whether I live or die before this sermon is over, so I'm alive. Oh Christ, you look big, glorious, great, precious, satisfying.

It's the point of life. That's what Paul says. How, Paul? How's it gonna happen? For, to me, I'm just gonna stick with death, right, because death makes it most clear.

We'll come back to life in a minute. For, to me, to die is gain. Are you with me? For, to me, to die is gain.

So my passion is that Christ be magnified in my body, in death. For, to me, to die is gain. Then he explained in verse 23, how is death gain? Death is gain because to die is to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Better. Better than being here. Better than lunch to come.

Better than sex. Better than preaching. It's better.

To be with him is better. So here's the argument. My dying will be a magnifying, a worshipping, an honoring of Christ if in my dying I experience Christ as a treasure that is more satisfying than everything I leave behind when I die.

Get that? That's the meaning of gain. If death is gain, and death is the leaving of everything that he can only have here, and all he gets is Christ, and he weighs these into balance. Everything the world can offer, and Christ.

No, no contest. In Paul's heart. And that's how he says he magnifies Christ.

To experience Christ as more satisfying, a greater, more precious treasure in death magnifies him when that gain, when that experience outweighs everything the world can offer. Now, I said I would get back to the life part, but to live is Christ. I think I could show you in the immediate context how that works, in the way the logic goes, but it's clear in chapter 3 verse 8. You know this verse.

Listen. I count, this is Paul now talking, not about how Christ is gained in death, but how he's gained in life. Listen.

I count everything as loss. Chapter 3 verse 8. I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things.

That's now. He says count. Everything is rubbish.

I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ. So death is gain because it brings us closer to Christ, who is more satisfying than everything we lose in death, and life is Christ because before death Paul had already resolved to count everything as loss compared to the surpassing value of knowing Jesus. That's how verse 20 works.

My earnest expectation and hope that now as always Christ might be magnified in my body. How? Because when I die, gain. When I live, Christ.

So here's my conclusion about the nature of the inner essence of worship. Experiencing Christ as a more satisfying treasure than everything we lose in death or have in life. That's the inner essence of worship.

I'll say it again. The inner essence of all worship. Inner essence, not totality.

There's more to it. Without this, nothing is worship. The inner essence of worship is experiencing Christ as more satisfying, a more satisfying treasure than everything you lose in death and everything you have in life.

That's the inner essence of worship, and let me just clarify again, it's not the totality of worship. We sing, we pray, we confess, we affirm our faith, we sit, we stand, we kneel, we bow in silence, we lift our hands, we leap for joy. All that is worship if it comes from the essence, and where that essence is missing, those acts are not worship.

They smell in heaven. That's what the Bible says. These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.

In vain do they worship me. Now, you may ask, we say this in passing, I know you in design, God, you're all into satisfaction in God, get that. Can't you just say, you have to always stick in that word satisfaction.

I mean, can you just say the inner essence of worship is having Christ as a greater treasure than everything in the world. Just leave out that word satisfaction. Why are you going to stick that emotionally laden word in there? I feel really strongly about this, you might detect.

Two reasons. Number one, being satisfied with Christ is implied in saying he's your greatest treasure, and I want to push that in your face. I want to push it through your eyeballs into your heart, or into your eyeballs into your brain, and then down into your heart.

I would really like you to feel what I feel right now and believe what I believe, namely that if you say, and you must say this if you're a Christian, Christ is my greatest treasure. Jesus said, he who loves mother or father more than me is not worthy of me, and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, period. You're not a Christian if you love your mother or your father or your children more than you love Jesus, and that's an affectional love, that's not a duty love, that's not a sacrificial love, that's an affection.

How do you feel about your kids? I love my kids. Yes, you should, and Jesus 10,000 times more, and if you don't love him more, so my first reason for using the word satisfied is because it forces this issue, it forces people who are willing to use the language of treasure or commitment or belief, while their hearts are going after Jesus. They're stuffed.

You can watch it, you just watch them, watch their lives. Jesus is a weekend thing. All week long, what they watch on TV, what they do, it just has nothing to do with their heart's delight in God, nothing.

I personally don't want to encourage those people to think they're Christian. My life commitment is to talk about the Bible in such a way that fake Christians feel fake, so that they can be saved. So many churches are just coddling them, just constantly coddling them.

It's going to be okay, it's going to be okay, he's a God of love, God of love. They're not Christian. Their hearts are not made new, they love other things more than they love Christ.

They think if they walk that aisle or side that corridor, did some few things, they're in it. Just talk to so many of these people. So that's my first reason.

It really is implied in the language of faith or the language of treasure that you are satisfied in Jesus more than everything else. Here's my second reason, and this is a review from this morning's session. Do you remember the one verse parable? The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up, and then in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has to buy that field.

Now you might think it would be very paradoxical, odd, if a person sold everything they had to have the kingdom, but they didn't do it with joy. That happens, folks. That happens.

Okay, tell me what I need to do. I need to sell some stuff. Got it.

I'm selling some stuff. How much should I sell? Well, Zacchaeus, half, Richelieu, all of it. Okay, got that.

That's not what he says. The kingdom of heaven, when the kingdom of heaven takes hold of you, and the king is revealed in the rule of the kingdom, as the treasure hidden in the field, you don't just sell your stuff, you are happy to sell your stuff. That's what it says.

I can't tell you how long, maybe 22 years, I read that verse and skipped right over that From his joy, he sold everything he had. You sell your stuff for Jesus without joy, plenty of ascetics in the world are going to hell. Sit on top of statues for 30 years, leave everything they have.

That's not what it says. So, I use the word satisfy to make that unescapable. I'm slamming the door.

Every chance I get on your escape from that, of slamming the door on anybody saying, well, you don't really need to feel satisfied in God, as long as he's your treasure, that's nonsense. God knows it, you know it. Treasure doesn't mean anything.

It's just a word without your heart. I love you more. You're more precious.

So, review. The inner essence of worship is experiencing Christ and all that God is for us in him as a more satisfying treasure than everything that death can take and life can give. That's the inner essence of worship.

To be a Christian is to be born again into that. That's what happens when you become a Christian. Your heart shifts off of preferring the world to preferring Christ.

That's the meaning of New Birth. That's the meaning of conversion. To live the Christian life in all of its practicalities is to act out of that.

And where people are not acting out of that, I don't think what they're acting is the fruit of righteousness. So now, here's what follows. Therefore, that inner essence of worship, not forms, that inner essence of worship must be the ultimate aim of all preaching, of every message, no matter the text and no matter the topic.

That's what you're aiming at. You're aiming at many other things. It might be a Sunday to raise the budget.

We're going to go under if you don't give here at the end of the year. I'm okay with that. If it tastes like this pastor loves Jesus more than that, his life doesn't hang on this budget.

I can tell it doesn't. I used to love to say to our elders when we're gathered facing the wall, we didn't have any idea what to do. I'd say, guys, the worst that can happen is that we all die, and that's okay.

I mean, seriously, think of it. Think of it. The worst problem.

Hebrews 2.14. Set free all those who've been held in lifelong bondage by the fear of death. Guys, you're free. We don't make the budget.

We go under. The church dies. Jesus reckons.

Do the people feel that? Or is your God your church? No, he's not. I'm sure he's. It's not.

So, we preach to awaken that. And my argument is that on the way to awakening the inner essence of worship in your people, your preaching must be an experiencing of that inner essence of worship. If right now I am not in this opening of the Bible and this truth, if I am not enjoying God more than your approval, if I'm not enjoying God more than the privilege of standing in front of all these people, God knows that.

He knows whether I'm an idolater or not. And if you had long enough with me, you'd smell it, too. You'd know he's fake.

Piper's fake. That scares the heebie-jeebies out of me. I don't want to be fake.

I'm afraid of fake more than I am anything, because there are a lot of people who have made shipwreck of their faith at the end of their 72-year life and gone to hell after preaching for 30 years. Yes, there are. So, I don't take that lightly.

As we preach the treasure, we are treasuring. Expository exaltation. As we hold up the pearl for everybody to see, that's called exposition, as we hold up the pearl of the reality behind the text, through the text, as we hold up the pearl, we are prizing the pearl.

As we invite people to the banquet, we are savoring the feast. What a world of difference between the kind of preaching that invites to a banquet and doesn't look like the preacher has any enjoyment of the banquet at all. What a sad thing.

It's not preaching. It's something else. Remember, the devil can do exposition.

In fact, the devil can take a text and explain its meaning up to a point accurately. Witness the devil with Jesus in the wilderness. That was shrewd.

Jesus was shrewder, but there's a lot of people that would have caved with that quotation of Scripture in the mouth of the devil. The devil can do exposition and mindless emotional people can do exaltation over a text when they have no idea what's in it. But, neither the devil nor mindless emotional people can exalt over the reality of the glory of God revealed in a text.

So, the devil can't preach. The devil and mindless emotional people can't do expository exaltation. Only born-again preachers can do that who've been illumined by the Holy Spirit to see the glory in the text, exalt in it, make it plain, draw people into that experience.

That's only possible by the Holy Spirit. The devil can't do it. Mindless emotional people can't do it.

Spiritual people can tell the difference. Preaching is a peculiar kind of speech. I mean, it is gloriously peculiar.

It is a worshipping speech, a worshipping speech designed by God for bringing the glories of His Word to the people of His favor for the awakening of worship. A little textual background. The English word preaching in the New Testament translates, almost always, to Greek words.

Euangelizimae and kairousa. A word about each of those and how they come together in preaching and how that makes it an utterly gloriously unique kind of speech. So, euangelizimae.

Pastors, you know what that is? Euangelo, gospel. Euangelizimae is a speaking of one who's bringing good news of great joy. Right? Luke 2.10 Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news That's euangelizimae.

I bring you good news of great joy. So, the preacher is euangelizimae-ing all the time. Even if he's talking about hell.

If he only talks about hell, on a scale of hell, out of people, and doesn't get to the best news in the world, maybe you don't have to go there. He's not preaching. He's sick.

So, that's the first characteristic of the preacher. He does this kind of speech called bring good news. We Christians have the best news on the planet in all the cultures of the world.

We do. If you don't believe that, resign. Secondly, keruso.

Keruso is the speech of a herald feeling the weight of an authority behind him as a town crier. So, the king says, okay, you go to this city, and in my name, with my authority, announce my message. That's keruso.

Herald is a good translation. He heralds. So, now you've got these two things.

And they come together in this New Testament reality called preaching. You've got a man thrilled with the best news in the world. Christ crucified, risen, reigning, saving the people for himself so that they don't have to perish but enjoy eternity with him forever.

And you've got a weight of divine authority on him so that he knows this is really big. This is not to be trifled with. I despair sometimes looking at the state of preaching in America when I bounce around at how

playful pastors are.

I don't get this. Why do you feel like you need to be so playful, so chatty, so casual? What in the world is that? There's not a joke in this book. Not one.

You don't like that. You can talk to him about that. I read a book one time called Christ and Humor.

I forget his name. Great guy when I was 25. And I read it.

I said, okay. Camel gone through the iron needle. Would they have laughed? About ten seconds.

Whoa. You kidding me? Then who can be saved? The camel can't get through the iron needle. No, it can't.

And you will not go into heaven because you love your money. Yeah, they might have laughed. That long.

This is not a message about humor. But I have four minutes and two pages. We're going to do this.

So preaching is a bringing together of those two kinds of speech. Heralding of the best news in the world from an infinitely powerful and glorious authority. God, not us.

It makes clear the meaning of biblical texts. Making clear the meaning of texts. And then you are exulting, enjoying, reveling over those texts and you are thus drawing people into the experience of that worship.

There's no speaking like it in the world, Christian preaching. It is utterly unique. And if the herald of this king and the proclaimer of this news does not exult in his king, in this news, he's an unworthy herald.

The king did not send his herald to announce his truth as though it were boring, casual, small, chatty, insignificant. He didn't. You go tell my people that I have an amnesty for them so that they won't be executed.

Because I'm going to execute them all. I am. I'm going to execute them all.

But I have sent my son to die and your job is to go tell them there's a way not to be executed when my wrath shows up here at the end of the age inflating fire. It's not a light thing. It's not a light thing.

It's a joyful thing. Spurgeon is not chipper. Spurgeon... I want to talk about humor so bad.

Spurgeon... Nobody had a better sense of humor than Charles Spurgeon. And he distinguished between levity and weighty humor. But we don't have time for that.

The preacher is never dealing with a mere body of facts to be clarified. He is dealing with a constellation of glories to be treasured. That's what you're dealing with every time you open this book.

Paul calls it the unsearchable riches of Christ. The preacher's aim is that the people would experience these riches, the unsearchable riches of Christ, as a more satisfying treasure than all that life can give or death can take. And he knows, the preacher knows, and you know that the pathway to that worship in your people comes through your worshipping over the word week in and week out in front of them.

So, I close. I thought about this a lot. I'm not picking this up on the spot.

It's right there, last paragraph. If death, if John Piper's death, if death were not a deeper, sweeter, closer experience of Jesus, I could wish to be young again. And if I were young again, like a handful of you, I would preach.

I would preach. Isn't anything like it? The weight of divine authority in the book, the unsearchable riches of Christ, the privilege of Holy Spirit given sight of those glories and enjoyment of them, the privilege of helping people see, see what's here, and drawing them into that experience, nothing compares to that. What a privilege.

What a privilege. So, if you have some years left, pastors, if you have some years left, don't waste your pulpit. Exult in the unsearchable riches of Christ week in and week out.

Open it for your people to see and draw them in to your joy. Let's pray. Father in heaven, I'm talking miracles.

I'm talking way above John Piper. And I just long for a wave of miraculous transformation to break across the church of Jesus Christ so that when we sing, we are singing from this inner essence of treasuring you above all things. And when we preach, we are preaching from this inner essence of worship.

Bless these folks. Thank you for them. Make this an epic moment in their spiritual walk.

At this conference, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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