

The Supremacy of God in Preaching

by John Piper

The supremacy of God should be the passion and theme of our preaching, reflecting the main heartbeat of God and essential for our salvation and redemption.

Duration: 47:38

Scripture: Psalm 37:4, Isaiah 48:11, Matthew 6:33, Acts 13:17, Acts 13:26-27

Topics: "Preaching"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the superficiality of news reports, history books, public education, and editorial news commentary due to the disregard for God. He argues that God is the main reality in the universe and should be the main focus in everything we do. The speaker highlights the influence of TV in causing people to forget about God. He concludes by discussing the mission statement of his church, which is to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things for the joy of all peoples, and how this mission statement should be applied to preaching.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from *Desiring God* is available at www.DesiringGod.org Thank you so much for helping me engage with God already tonight. I love to speak into a worship context.

I love to speak to a worshipping people. And so thank you so much for engaging with God in your time of worship. So energetically and what appeared to me authentically.

I value very much walking into a context like this. I feel drawn up into the presence of the Lord. Another high point tonight was, and I don't think they'll believe me when I go home, when I say that I actually spoke at the same meeting with A.W. Tozer.

I mean they will want to just fall down and touch me. So how did you arrange such a thing? This is just... I just could go home now and be so happy. One of the great advantages of being at the same church for 17 years is that your personal life mission statement and the church's mission statement become one.

Let me give you our church's mission statement and it is my life mission statement and you'll see why the request from Paul Bubna to address these particular topics that he gave me was a request I couldn't resist. Our mission statement says, We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things,

for the joy of all peoples. I'll say it again.

We exist to spread a passion for the supremacy of God in all things, for the joy of all peoples. So when he said, How about tackling the supremacy of God in preaching tonight and the supremacy of God in prayer tomorrow morning and the supremacy of God in missions tomorrow night? It didn't take me very long to say, I would love to do that with your people. And so I do love to do it tonight.

And I would like to pray once more just briefly and ask God's help in this incredibly important task. So let's bow and ask his help. Oh, Father in heaven, I thank you so much for these brothers and sisters who have engaged with you tonight to glorify your name in corporate worship, have extolled you by drawing attention to the value of your name in missions and are now ready to hear a word that I believe you've given me.

And I pray for your help to deliver it. Protect us, Father, from error, imbalance, pride, fear, and grant that there would come the Holy Spirit upon this place with great power and that any without Christ here would be drawn into life and that every saint would be strengthened, that every pastor, preacher would be made bold to make you supreme in his work. Come and help, I pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. My passion to make God supreme in preaching, both in my own and in everybody I can influence, took a tremendous leap forward several years ago when I read in a journal that you may have heard of called First Things, a journal of political and religious comment, this quotation from a scientist, a specialist in general relativity theory named Charles Meisner, about the attitude of Albert Einstein toward organized religion and preaching 50 years ago. Albert Einstein died in 1955.

Here's the quote. I do see the design of the universe as essentially a religious question. That is, one should have some kind of respect and awe for the whole business.

It's very magnificent and shouldn't be taken for granted. In fact, I believe that is why Einstein had so little use for organized religion, although he strikes me as a basically very religious man. He must have looked at what the preachers said about God and felt that they were blaspheming.

He had seen much more majesty than they had ever imagined, and they were just not talking about the real thing. My guess is that he simply felt that religions he had run across did not have a proper respect for the author of the universe. I was so cut in reading that that I pledged God to redouble my efforts not ever to have anybody be able to say that about me.

And I want to so speak tonight as to cut preachers and aspiring preachers and those who form search committees in call of preachers so as to want never to have that said of us. And yet I believe it is a fair statement about much preaching in the American pulpit. Now, I admit that my sampling is very limited.

Preachers have this one great advantage. They don't get to hear each other. They're dependent on tapes and TVs and conferences and a few other things.

And so I confess that my judgments are fallible and limited. And yet on my limited exposure, I would say that Einstein's concern is valid. He said four things.

First, preachers don't seem to have seen as much of the majesty of God as he had staring through a telescope or studying his physics. Secondly, he said preachers just don't seem to be talking about the real thing. Thirdly, there doesn't seem to be a proper respect for the author of the universe.

And fourth, preachers seem to be blaspheming. Now, that charge of blasphemy, of course, is loaded. It's meant to carry a wallop to say that the real thing just doesn't seem to be coming through.

They claim to be talking about the absolutely eternal, infinite, unchanging creator of the universe. But it doesn't feel like it. It doesn't look like it.

It doesn't sound like it. For those who are stunned by the indescribable magnitude of the universe, not to mention the infinitely greater author of the universe, a steady diet of psychological, soothing and practical how-tos and relational therapy gets very thin and somehow seems very inauthentic and gives the impression, are we talking about the real thing? Well, everybody here remembers, perhaps from high school physics, that light travels at about 5.87 trillion miles a year. We all know that, right? And you may also remember that the galaxy of which our planet, solar system, is a part, Milky Way, is about 100,000 light years across.

That's about 587,000 trillion miles. It is one of a million such galaxies within the optical range of our strong telescopes. And in our galaxy, there are about 100 billion stars.

The sun is one of those modest-sized ones, with a temperature around the edges of about 6,000 degrees centigrade. It travels at about 155 miles per second and therefore will make its first orbit around the galaxy in about 200,000 years. Now, scientists know these things.

And they are awed by them. And they conclude, if there is, as the Christians say, a personal God, a personal God who spoke that into being and, as Hebrews 1.3 says, upholds it by the word of His power, then there ought to be a certain respect for Him. And awe and dread and fear at not knowing, loving, trusting, or obeying such a God.

And certainly there would be a constant talking about this God. And certainly the manifold greatness and glory of such a God would be ever-present in the life of His people. And they would be stunned by the limitless things they could say about His magnificence.

You get a feel for this when you read Isaiah 40. These words from verses 25 and 26. To whom then will you compare me, says the Lord? That I should be like Him, says the Holy One.

Lift up your eyes on high and see who created these stars. He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name. By the greatness of His might, because He is strong in power, not one of them is missing.

Now ponder that for a moment. Not only did He create them, but He knows their number and He knows their name. Every star in the universe has a name.

Ever ask why that is? 005986738 or maybe Jim or John or Sally. I think the reason they have names is so that He can call them and tell them what to do. That's why they have names.

They obey Him. The winds and the waves and the stars obey Him. The stars in their courses obediently, obediently shine.

Einstein felt some of this and his response was, the preachers are just not talking about the real thing. If God exists, the God of the Bible, then what's wrong with our preaching? Or let's put it positively. Surely then, the theme, the spirit, the atmosphere of our preaching should be the majesty and the glory and the

supremacy of God.

And everything else that we talk about should be brought into relationship to this. And it should be the passion of our preaching and our lives. Now, what I want to do tonight is pose two questions about this.

One is to ask why this is so. Why should the supremacy of God be the passion of our preaching? And secondly, how shall we then preach? Question number one then. Why should the supremacy of God be the passion and the theme of our preaching? A couple of years ago, I'm not sure how long it's been, maybe more than a couple, I was doing this interview with Preaching Today.

And they asked me that question on the telephone. Why do you make so much of the supremacy of God being the theme of preaching? And the answer I gave was what came to my mind as they were teaching or asking me this. I said, well, it's because the supremacy of God is the theme of redemptive history.

In fact, if you push it all the way back, the supremacy of God is the theme of God. What is supreme to God ultimately is God. And if God is supreme in his own affections and in his own planning and in his own world and in his own word, then surely God should be supreme in our sermon planning and in our enunciation of his word.

I remember just a few years ago, I was at my alma mater preaching. First chance I ever had to stand in the pulpit of the chapel of Wheaton College. This is going to be exciting.

And I stood up there and the first words out of my mouth were, looked out over these 2000 students and said, the chief end of God. Is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And I had friends up in the balcony and they went like that and said afterwards, we thought you just blew your one chance to get it right at Wheaton.

And you quoted the Westminster catechism wrong. It's the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. But having listened to the whole 25 minutes, they knew it was no mistake.

Because I meant it with all my heart. I believe it's the main point of the Bible that the chief end of God is to glorify God. I think that's what Tozer said with every book that he ever wrote.

The chief end of God is to glorify God and enjoy himself forever. Jonathan Edwards, along with A.W. Tozer and a few others, is a hero of mine. And the book that made this point in my life in a life changing way about 25 years ago now is called Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World.

And that's the short title. The Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World. And in it, he makes this point.

I'll read you the thesis. The great end of God's works, which is so variously expressed in Scripture, is indeed but one. And this one end is most properly and comprehensively called the glory of God.

Now let me read you one passage of Scripture so that you get the flavor of why I say God's supremacy is the main heartbeat of God. And therefore, it must be the main heartbeat of preaching about God. Isaiah 48, 9 to 11.

God says, For my name's sake, I defer my anger. For the sake of my praise, I restrain it for you. That I may not cut you off.

Behold, I have refined you, but not like silver. I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it.

For how should my name be profaned? My glory, I will not give to another. I think those three verses are probably the most dense, concentrated, God-centered verses in the Bible. Six times.

For my name's sake, for my name's sake, for my glory, I will not give my glory to another. Why? It's because it's His passion. God's glory is His passion.

He created the world to go public with His glory. He created human minds to understand His glory. He created human hearts to delight in His glory.

And He gets more glory when mind and heart are engaged with thought and feeling than if only mind or only feeling are engaged. Which is why we have at the bottom of our stationery that word that sums up all my theology. God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

This is the good news. That God's quest to be glorified and your quest to be satisfied are not at odds. They are one in worship.

Therefore, my answer to my first question is, why do we make God supreme in preaching? We do so because God is supreme in the heart of God. And in redemptive history. And in salvation.

And in the Bible. And in missions. And in prayer.

Which we'll get to later. Last question. How should we do this? How then shall we preach? Now to answer that question, what I would like to do is take you to a sermon that I think is probably the most God-centered sermon in the Bible.

And if you have a Bible and you can read it in the light that's out there for you, you can turn with me to Acts chapter 13. It would be helpful if you looked at it. Because instead of reading this sermon, I'm going to jump from verse to verse and verse portion to verse portion.

And make points that draw out what you might have missed. Sometimes we read the scripture so often, we fail to be stunned by the way it is written. And the way the apostles preached.

So, here's Paul. Arriving at Antioch of Pisidia. He goes into the synagogue.

He's invited to address the people. And he preaches a survey of redemptive history. And he does it in a way that I wonder if any of us speaks.

Let's start at verse 17. And I'll simply show you why I call this the most God-centered, God-exalting, God-saturated sermon in the Bible. Verse 17a.

It was God who chose Israel from all the people on the earth for his purposes. Middle of verse 17. It was God who made the people great during their stay in Egypt.

It wasn't natural fertility of Jews. God made them grow. The last part of verse 17.

It was God who led them out of Egypt with an uplifted arm. In other words, God flexed his muscles in Egypt so that people would see his strength. God meant to be seen in the exodus.

Verse 18. It was God who bore with Israel in the wilderness. Or another old reading with just one letter different in the Greek.

God carried Israel like a father. So he was guide and sustainer and father throughout the wilderness wanderings. Verse 19.

It was God who destroyed the seven nations that they encountered as they entered Canaan. Yes, humans swung the sword. Yes, they threw the spear.

Yes, they swirled their slingshots. But, as we all know from Proverbs 21, the horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory belongs to the Lord. Second part of verse 19.

It was God who gave Israel the land of Canaan as an inheritance. If you give something to somebody as an inheritance, you own it. It wasn't the nations who owned the land of Canaan.

God owned the land of Canaan and he gives it to whomever he pleases, Paul says. The earth is the Lord's, for he made it, Psalm 95 5. Verse 20 in Acts 13. It was God who gave Israel judges.

These rulers didn't rise up of their own. Samson. Deborah.

Gideon. God raised them up, it says. Verse 21.

It was God who gave to Israel her first king, Saul. Verse 22. It was God who removed Saul.

Just like Daniel says. Remember? God changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings, or as Daniel 4 32 says, the most high rules over the kingdom of men.

He gives it to whomever he will. That's what's in Paul's mind here as he enunciates the removal of Saul. And now verse 22, second half.

He raises up David, the son of Jesse. A shepherd boy. A harp plucker.

A sling shooter. And God, against all human expectations, says, that's my man. He will be king.

Verse 23. It was God who brought to Israel a savior, Jesus. God brought Jesus to the earth.

God brought Jesus to Israel. And not by any mere immediate impersonal force. But you can see at the end of the verse the phrase.

As he promised, which means this thing had been planned. This thing had been thought through centuries before. God looked to see what he would do at the fullness of time.

And he spoke it through promises and prophets that he would do it this way. Verses 24 and 25 we meet. Of all people to choose to speak about in Antioch of Pisidia, John the Baptist.

And what does he choose out of all the things he could say about John the Baptist? And of all the quotations he could quote of John the Baptist in this sermon. He chooses to quote these words. I am not he.

No. But after me, one is coming. The sandals of whose feet I am not worthy to untie.

Now Jesus had said, nobody's greater, born of woman, than John the Baptist. Remember that? And John the Baptist says, I'm not worthy to untie the shoes of Jesus Christ. In other words, Paul selects a word from John the Baptist that throws all relief or all attention to Jesus.

The son of the living God. The whole story is about Jesus. Verse 26.

Paul says, to us now. He's drawing the people of Pisidia and Antioch in. To us has been sent the message of salvation.

Why this passive verb? Who is this sender? The answer is God. So God planned it long ago. God promised it through the prophets.

God sent and brought his son, Jesus. And now God is sending it. To the nations.

Verse 27. Those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him. Nor understand the utterance of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath.

Fulfilled these by condemning him. Now that's an incredible sentence. If you said to me or to the people in Pisidia and Antioch.

God promised these things. People read them in the word and therefore in harmony with God did them. It wouldn't be as incredible.

That's not what it said. Let me read it very carefully for you. It says.

Those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers. Because they did not recognize Jesus. Nor understand the utterance of the prophets.

Fulfilled them. What in the world does that mean? That means God did it. They didn't do it.

Every hammer blow. On the nails through his wrists. Was the work of his father.

In fulfillment of his promises. To vindicate his glory. And save the nations.

In other words, Paul chose words here. Paul chose words in this sermon. That would get all attention.

And all authority. And all supremacy. And all centrality.

For the one main actor. In the universe. God.

This is an amazing sermon. Paul is on a mission. For the sake of the supremacy of his God.

Verse 29. And when they had fulfilled. All that was written of him.

That took him down from the tree. And laid him in a tomb. So right to the end.

It's all fulfilling. God's word. And God's plan.

Finally, verse 30. It was God who raised Jesus from the dead. God raised him from the dead.

Now it is true that Jesus said. Nobody takes my life from me. I lay it down.

Of my own accord. And if I lay it down. I will take it again.

Jesus raised Jesus from the dead. But the point of Paul's sermon. Is to get all attention.
For the father. Through the son. Ever come to the end of that great hymn.
In Philippians 2. And every tongue will confess. Every knee will bow. And every tongue will confess.
That Jesus is Lord. To the glory of. God the father.
It's all going to terminate on God the father. Jesus is God. And he will reflect all glory.
To his father. Well I ask you preachers. Do you preach like that? I ask you lay people.
Do you talk like that? When you talk about. The world. You say.
God did this. And God did that. And God did this.
And God did that. And God raised up this president. And God put this president down.
And God raised up this senator. And God put that senator down. And God put this mayor in place.
And God put that down. And God ordained this sinful strategy. And God.
Cut that thing. When it's purposes. Was done.
And God did this. And God did that. And God reigns.
Over the nations. Do you talk like that? Do you make him supreme? Paul's point is there was a great.
There is a great.
Glorious supreme. God. Now what are we going to.
What are we going to do with this? We close with just. Perhaps a practical illustration. Of how we will
weave such a thing.
Into all of our. Preaching. Here are the thoughts that come to my mind.
As I apply this to my life. As a preacher and to yours. We live in an unbelievably naive and superficial age.
And it's the last thing most people would think to say about it. But it's not the last thing A.W. Tozer thought
to say about it. What I mean by superficial is.
Something is superficial. When the treatment of it. Involves everything you can say about it except the
main things.
Now as a scholar you can say many things. Intelligently. About many things.
And if you leave out. The main connections. In reality.
You're treating it superficially. Therefore I conclude that the communication media. In America are all
superficial.
I conclude that the educational enterprises in our universities. Are all superficial. I conclude that virtually all
news reports are superficial.

Virtually all history books are superficial. Virtually all public education is superficial. Virtually all editorial news commentary is superficial.

For one very simple reason that a child can understand. It's because of the incredible. Unspeakable.

Unimaginable. Disregard. For God.

In it all. God is the main reality. In the universe.

And is the main connection. Purpose. Ground.

And sustaining power. Of everything that is. And therefore any time you treat anything.

Without relation to God. You are superficial. And the fact that that sounds odd to us.

Shows how infected the CMA. The Baptist General Conference. And all American evangelicals are.

With our God neglecting. God belittling. And increasingly God despising.

If you watch enough TV. You cannot help but forget God. He isn't there.

And the sheer absence of God. Is blasphemy. Therefore I plead with you.

Pastors. To make him supreme. In your preaching.

I pray for my sons and my daughter. I have five kids. And two of my boys are out of school now.

One is in college. And one is in high school. And my little girl hasn't started school yet.

And I pray oh God. In all of their learning. Grant that they would see God.

And that they would see you. May they see you in geometry. May they see you in history.

May they see you in philosophy. May they see you in English. May they see you in physical education.

May they see you in spelling. Spelling. And I can hear the cynics write.

A Christian spelling. There are Christian ways to spell words. Give me a break.

Pastor John. Now that's the way a cynic. A superficial.

20th century saturated God neglecting cynic. Responds to talking about God centered spelling. I've had two kinds of sons.

Academic and non-academic. And they fit the pattern perfectly. Son number one.

The scholar. Son number two. The athlete.

The jock. As soon as he could get out of high school. He was done.

He was gone. And he's red hot for Jesus by the way. Well.

I remember the day. When this. Dyslexic.

Non-speller. Said to me. Why should I care about spelling the way everybody else spells.

And he meant it. Because it hurts so bad. It's.

And I said well. Um. You won't be able to communicate as well.

If you don't learn how to spell the way everybody else spells. I don't care about communicating well. Why should I care about communicating well.

Now. Here we are. Public school teachers.

You got this kid in your class. And he raised his hand after flunking his second spelling test. Why should I care about communicating.

Now right here we're about a millimeter beneath superficiality. Not very far. And the ways are going to divide right here teacher.

What are you going to tell him. Here's one answer. This is.

The blasphemous answer. The standard answer. The 20th century answer.

The public school answer. Well. If you don't learn how to spell.

Or you don't learn how to communicate. You won't succeed in business. And you won't make as much money.

And you won't advance in the community. And here's the real clincher. The bottom line gospel.

You won't have as high self-esteem. So get to work. And we'll help you.

Godless. Godless. Answers all.

Here's another answer. My answer to my son. And to anybody who will listen.

Ben. You should care about communicating and learning how to spell. Because you were created in the image of God.

And God's a great communicator. You're in his image son. You're in his image.

To be a human being is no small thing. And he is a great communicator. You should want to communicate.

And not be indifferent. To putting obstacles in the way. Number two.

You've got something infinitely important to communicate Ben. You've got God to communicate. You've got love to communicate.

You've got salvation to communicate. You've got Jesus to communicate. You've got the gospel to communicate.

You've got eternal life to communicate. You've got purpose to communicate. You can't be indifferent son.

To whether you communicate and put obstacles in the way of your communication. Third. Ben, God is love.

And his love is scorned when we treat as a matter of indifference. Whether or not we communicate good things for other people that they desperately need to hear from us. And finally.

You need to communicate and care about communicating. And not putting spelling stumbling blocks in the way of your communication. Because language is God's idea.

From the beginning. In the beginning was the word. The word was with God.

It's God's idea. He is not a God of chaos and confusion. He's a God of beauty and a God of order.

He's not a God of anarchy. Even spelling anarchy. Not a God of spelling anarchy.

And you know. If you're sitting out there now. And you don't care.

About the supremacy of God in spelling. Then you won't get my plea tonight. You just won't get it.

Because my closing plea is this. Preachers especially. But all of us.

If we preachers. Don't lift up. The supremacy of God.

Week in and week out. And show a passion. For the supremacy of God in all things.

Including spelling. Boating. Sex.

Eating. Leisure. Stock market.

If we don't show the supremacy of God. And how the glory of God has a bearing on everything. Who's going to do it? There are no influences regularly.

In the lives of my people. Calling them. Away from the God belittling.

God neglecting. God despising. Television and culture that they are immersed in.

Besides me. Because most of them don't. Tune in to regular radio.

And most radio doesn't get it anyway. Most of them aren't reading books. And most of your people aren't either.

But one hour a week. Maybe two. Maybe three.

They'll listen to you. And if you don't lift up the glory of God. And try to wean them off the breast.

Of God neglecting America. Who's going to do it? Let's pray. Almighty God.

Our hearts desire in this room right now I believe. Is that. You would be magnified in our pulpits.

And in our Sunday school classes. And in our personal witnessing. And in our living.

In such a way that America would awaken. To the glory and the majesty. And the supremacy of the God who made the world.

And is redeeming the world through Jesus Christ. Oh Father draw near by your spirit here. And seal these things to our hearts.

And apply them in our churches. And in our world. And in the mission of the Christian Missionary Alliance Movement.

I pray in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

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