

The Supremacy and Sweetness of God

Community Worship Service

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of preaching in worship services, exploring why preaching is prominent and how it plays a crucial role in glorifying God through understanding and savoring His Word. The speaker delves into the significance of the Bible being inspired by God and how preaching serves as a means to enlighten the mind and move the heart in worship, ultimately leading to expository exaltation.

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 4:2, Nehemiah 8:6, 1 Peter 1:23, Matthew 5:16, Psalm 119:105, Hebrews 4:12, Colossians 3:16

Topics: "The Power of Preaching", "Glorifying God through His Word"

Description

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Transcript

Let's pray together. Lord, if it weren't for amazing grace, there's nobody who could stand in Your presence, let alone preach Your Word. So we are duly bathed.

And thank You so much for the truth. I ask You to come and help me to make Your Word plain. And I ask that You'd come and give ears to hear.

I pray for good and honest hearts where the seed is not plucked away or strangled or burnt up, but bears fruit 30, 60, 100-fold in 100 years. So come, I pray now, and anoint this moment with Your presence and Your power. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, I pray, Amen.

If you have a Bible, I invite you to turn with me to 2 Timothy 3. And I'm going to read verses 16 into chapter 4, verse 5. And while you're looking, I'll tell you that my aim this morning is to ask the question and try to answer it, why preaching is so prominent in our worship services. Why in this service, which is a worship service in particular, does my part assume 30 or 35 minutes worth? And that's fairly typical around the Protestant world. Why is that? Can you give an account for that? So let's read beginning at 2 Timothy 3.16. And you all know that these chapter divisions are later and therefore we'll move right on in and go

through probably verse 5. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His coming, preach the Word. Be ready in season and out of season. 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 myths. Now, I'm not just speaking to would-be preachers or to preachers this morning. I'm speaking to everybody who is a believer and who goes to worship to meet God on Sunday morning.

And I think all of you should be able to give an account for why preaching assumes such a prominent role in the services that you go to. Because you need to know what to do with it when it happens. If you don't know why it's there, you won't know what to do with it when it happens.

And secondly, you need to know whether it's happening so that you can make judgments in particular this would be the third reason, so that when you sit on a search committee, what you're looking for in calling a preaching pastor. Many people do not have any idea what they're looking for or what is supposed to be happening in this pulpit Sunday after Sunday. So, at least for those three reasons, every Christian should know why preaching assumes such a prominent role in the worship life of the church.

What is it about preaching and what is it about worship that makes it fitting, perhaps even biblically mandated, that a large portion of a worship service be devoted to this thing called preaching? So that's my question this morning that I want to try to answer with you. Now, it's two questions built into one. If you just think about it for a moment, it really breaks out into why is the Bible or the Word of God written prominent? And why is this particular way of speaking the Bible prominent? Those are not the same question, but they are necessarily connected.

And I want to take them in turn and try to answer them for you from the Word. It's not obvious, in our day especially, that if you say the Bible should be prominent or the Word of God should be prominent, that necessarily preaching should be prominent. I might just read the Bible for 30 minutes.

That would make the Bible prominent. That would honor the Bible. Or we might dramatize the Bible.

Or we might sing the Bible. Or we might discuss the Bible. Or we might analyze and lecture about the grammatical, historical content of particular texts.

All those would be ways of giving the Bible prominence. Why preaching? What is it and what is it about worship that makes this particular form of delivering the Word of God fitting and right? Well, I'm going to pass over one of the huge reasons that I would undertake if I had time, namely that in the beginning was the Word, but I will pass over that and move straight to our text in v. 16 of 2 Timothy 3. And direct your attention to these stunning words. All Scripture is inspired by God.

Now, that's huge, folks. That's really big. You need to settle this here at Beeson before you leave.

You've got to get this thing settled. If this thing remains unsettled in your ministry, the trumpet will not give a clear sound. You've got to have this thing settled.

If it's not settled, stay up night after night. Wrestle with God. Wrestle with the books.

Wrestle with the Greek and Hebrew. Wrestle with the naysayers until you're either in or you're out of this verse. You've got to get this thing settled.

It will make all the difference in the world what you do in this pulpit or whether you get into it or not. This is huge. God has been pleased, according to that sentence, to reveal Himself in a written Word.

God stands forth from His hiddenness and His invisibility and manifests Himself in His power through words written on a page. It's an awesome thing to think about. So God is prominent in worship through His Word.

The Bible is prominent because God has breathed it. God has revealed Himself through it. God has spoken it.

It is God speaking and therefore if worship is all about God, if worship is communion with God and delight in God and cherishing God and seeing God and savoring God, it's not hard to understand why a breathed Word from God should be right at the center revealing God. Now, there's more. There's so much more.

Worship is a response to God's works. And the Word of God depicts and does those works. The Word of God portrays and performs those works.

So if worship is about reading the glory of God, off of the works of God, and responding in love to God because of that glory, then to put those words and works before the people are huge. The Word depicts and does the works. The Word portrays and performs the works.

And in His works, in His handiworks, we see His glory and glory gives rise to worship. Now let me show you in the text where I'm thinking. Keep reading.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. Now connect then the Word and the work. All Scripture, all words in the Bible are inspired by God and the upshot is that works are performed in the power of those words.

The words, according to this text, fit, equip, make possible works. And Jesus said, let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works or good deeds and give glory to your Father. So, where do people read glory? They read it off of the works that have been wrought by God.

If God hadn't wrought the works, God wouldn't get the glory. You'd get the glory. You've got to find the way to live, read, study, pray, be, so that the works you perform get glory for God and not you.

And right at the key to that is the Word of God, according to these two verses, because all Scripture being inspired by God makes a person adequate and equipped and enabled and empowered to do those things off of which people are reading God. So you see the connection between Word, works, glory, and worship. If worship is all about seeing God's glory and responding in love, then worship is about hearing a Word that portrays and performs the works of God.

One more thing on this first point about the centrality of the Bible and the Word. One of the works that as a pastor, I feel very keenly aware of as absolutely necessary for worship is the work of life creating. How does life get created in a congregation? Where does life come from? The answer is that it comes from the Word.

I'm going to go outside my text here to pick this up, but I think it's implicit in verse 16 when it says that the Word works conviction. Conviction is not what dead men feel. When true evangelical conviction lands on a congregation, it's the twitching of life.

But I'm going to take it from 1 Peter 1.23. You have been born again, that is, born to life, not of seed which is perishable, but imperishable. That is, through the living and enduring Word of God. One of the things that preachers are so keenly aware of is that we cannot make life.

And we want life. The challenge of preaching is that you want what you can't perform, which is why we pray, why we believe, why we are utterly cast upon the living God and the living Word. No life, no worship.

No Word, no life. No Word, no worship. Therefore, the Word is central to worship.

That's point number one. And there are only two. Second question.

Why is preaching, that is this particular form of the Word, why is it fitting, prominent, proper, and I think mandated? Well, let's keep reading. No chapter break. He has just said all Scripture is inspired.

It is mighty to transform lives and produce works off of which people read the glory of God. I solemnly charge you. Before I read this again, we read over text so fast.

One of the great reasons to study Greek and Hebrew, and it's only one of many utterly crucial reasons. I praise God that I was told this morning that they are required here at Beeson. Don't ever change that.

Thus saith the Lord. Don't engage in curriculum revision in that direction. Alright, close parenthesis.

It slows you down and causes you as it caused me in recent weeks to say I have never in the Bible anywhere seen anything like verse 1 of 2 Timothy 4. Have you? Has any command anywhere in the Bible been introduced with such aseverations piled one upon the other like this? Count them. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing and by His kingdom. Now, when somebody introduces something like that, it's important.

It's really important. There's nothing like that anywhere else in the Bible. I can't find it.

This is amazing. This stuns me. Why does He pile upwards like this? Why are you saying this? By His coming.

By His kingdom. By His judgship. By the living.

By the dead. Solemn charge. Presence of God.

Presence of Christ. What is going on here? This is huge! And yet we just... We've got to read 20 minutes worth in the morning, so get this thing read. Oh, that God would give you the gift of reading slowly.

Now, let's read the whole thing. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead and by His appearing and His kingdom, preach the Word. Now, in the

context here, I believe it would be fair to say that this preaching that Paul exhorts Timothy to do is not merely in the cause of public evangelism.

I do know that that is the function of preaching in the book of Acts mainly. On the Areopagus, in the synagogue, by the river, wherever. Lift up your voice and announce the gospel.

However, in this context, preceded by words of the Word is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, and followed by the words about teaching, it seems to me that he is saying make this the meat and potatoes of your church ministry too. Why? Why is preaching so prominent? You could stop right here. I could end the message here and say the Bible says to preach.

It says so. So do it. Close the book.

Go home. And that would be enough. But the Bible isn't like that.

The Bible is the kind of book that when it makes commands, it gives reasons. And it helps human hearts affirm the fittingness of the commands. And I am thankful for that.

So let's ask why. We do that devoutly. Why God? Why do you command, preach the Word in the context that it's here put in in 2 Timothy? Now one answer to that would be perhaps a historical reason.

It is warranted and given precedent by Old Testament and New Testament and synagogue. Let's trace that out for a minute. Let's go back and you listen instead of looking these up.

Nehemiah 8, 6. Ezra, in the context of worship, blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the, it says Ezra 8, 6 to 8. I mean Nehemiah 8, 6 to 8. Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered amen, amen, lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. And the Levites helped the people to understand the law while the people remained in their places.

And they read from the book, from the law of God clearly, and they gave the sense so that the people understood the meaning. So there you have a kind of Old Testament precedent where the law of God is read, the people stand assembled listening, and then perhaps they split up into larger groupings and the Levitical preachers stood up and gave the sense, helped the people understand the law, and applied it to their lives. Now, you come over into the New Testament and you see the same pattern.

For example, in Luke 4, Jesus comes to His own hometown in Nazareth. He walks into the synagogue. He takes the scroll.

He opens it to Isaiah. He reads a portion. And then He sits down.

Now, this is interesting. I just read a biography of Augustine. Augustine preached for about 34 years in Hippo.

And he sat to preach. And the people stood. Now that would revolutionize much of our preaching.

It would lift, it would elevate the issue of content and reduce histrionics. Perhaps it should be tried. Jesus sat down to give His exposition.

And He said, this Scripture is today fulfilled in your hearing. In other words, He gave a powerful, personal application of the text from Isaiah. Isaiah.

You come over into Acts. You find the same thing. Acts 13.

On the Sabbath day, Paul and his team went into the synagogue. Sat down. After the reading of the law and the prophets, the synagogue officials sent to them saying, Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.

And Paul preaches from this verse of 16 to 31. So a first answer to the question, why should we preach the Word? Beyond that the Bible says preach the Word, is that you have this warrant from the Old Testament, the New Testament synagogue, and the pattern of Jesus and Paul there. I don't think that's enough.

Let's go one more step and ask this question. What is it about worship in particular that would call for this kind of word from God called preaching? I'm going to quote Jonathan Edwards here. He's next to the Bible in my own pilgrimage in authority.

He's not the Bible, but he's close. And this is what he wrote. I have never read anything better on worship than the end for which God created the world, which is why I'm going to take a writing leave in six days and spend the month of March re-editing and writing a long introduction to this little book called The End for Which God Created the World.

Few books have been more instrumental in my life, and I thank God for Jonathan Edwards. Bless you, Jonathan. I've never seen something like this.

This is just wonderful. You don't know what this means to me, to see him looking down on me like this. So this is what he says.

God glorifies Himself toward the creatures in two ways. One, by appearing to their understanding. And two, by communicating Himself to their hearts and in their rejoicing and delighting in and enjoying the manifestations which He makes of Himself.

God is glorified not only by His glories being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it, delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it. His glory is then received by the whole soul, both by the understanding and by the heart.

Close quote. That is a paradigm transforming quote. The glory of God hangs on being seen and savored.

Therefore, if you would worship, if you would glorify God, you must pursue the savoring of God relentlessly. If you pick up the philosophical notion somewhere, heretical as it is, that it is morally defective to pursue your joy, you will not worship. Because the glory of God hangs on not only being seen, but being treasured and cherished and loved and enjoyed, so that you say, I count everything as loss for the surpassing value of seeing this and having this.

This is my treasure. This is my satisfaction. If you don't pursue that, you don't worship.

If that's true, it has huge implications for the kind of communication that gets delivered on Sunday morning. Huge implications. Worship is seeing and savoring, understanding and feeling, knowing and loving.

The Bible is strewn with commands. Think, consider, meditate, remember. Be babes in evil, but in thinking, be mature.

And it is strewn with commands. Mourn, delight, fear, rejoice, hope, be glad. The affective and the cognitive are everywhere in the Bible.

You may not choose between these two. Now, if that's true, if worship demands that in the moment where God is about to be glorified, there needs to be an understanding and a feeling, a seeing and a savoring. It begins to make sense why Paul, in verse 2 of our text, said, not teach and not analyze, but kerukson, preach.

Now, this is a seminary community, so I use a Greek word. And I'm going to talk about it for just a minute. You know that the word kerusso is the job of a herald.

There were no media, no TVs, no radios, no newspapers. When the king had a message for his subjects, he sent a town crier, hear ye, hear ye, hear ye. And the crowds gathered.

Thus saith the king, everyone who will swear fealty to the sun shall have life. Those who reject the sun shall come under the ban. Bah.

That's kerusso. Now, a little child at the back of the crowd in the town might say, what's fealty? Now, preaching tells the kid what fealty is. Preaching is designed to take the understanding and enlighten it and to take the heart and move it.

And if you have a seeing that does not result in a savoring, you become heady. You become intellectualistic. Or if you try to short-circuit the intellectual seeing and move straight to the savoring, you become emotionalistic.

You manipulate people. You can do that, and you don't want to do it. The teaching component is all over this text, even though the word is herald.

Herald the Word, Timothy. Herald the Word, Timothy. Because the heralding has the components that make sense in worship.

Worship is not just head stuff. Worship is not just heart stuff. Worship is seeing and savoring, understanding and feeling.

Worship is glorifying God by seeing the glory of God and loving the glory of God. And therefore, the form of communication has to be that which informs the mind and moves the heart. And God has designed a thing called preaching to that end.

So my conclusion is that preaching is prominent in worship because worship is not just understanding, it's also feeling. Worship is seeing and savoring. Worship is a response of the mind and the heart.

And therefore, there is a kind of communication that is not just an explanation for the mind and it's not just stimulation to the emotions. Rather, it is a teaching and a reaching. It is a showing of the truth of Christ and a savoring of the glory of Christ.

It is an exposition of the Word of God and an exaltation in the God of the Word. So if you want a little phrase to put it in, this is the phrase I've come back to for the last seven or eight years as I've reflected on

my own task. Worship calls for a form of communication that is expository exaltation.

That's my definition of preaching. Expository exaltation. And therefore, I call upon you, wherever you are, whatever your calling is, be a person of the Word.

Be a person of the Word. The Word read, the Word meditated on, the Word memorized, the Word taught, and especially, the Word. Oh, Father in Heaven, I plead with You to ignite a fire for Your holy Word in the hearts of Your people.

God, make us a people who love the Word because we love to see the works, because we love to see the glory for that we were made. And may we not just see it, but savor it. Be transformed by it.

Magnify it in this needy world for the sake of the nations. Through Jesus Christ, Your Son, I pray.

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