

# Worship That Comes by the Word, The: Satisfaction in the Greatness of God

by John Piper

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of making God the center of preaching, highlighting the difference between worship and preaching, and arguing that true biblical preaching is God-exalting worship.*

**Duration:** 34:01

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Romans 4:20, Romans 10:14, Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 1:21, 1 Corinthians 2:4-5

**Topics:** "Worship", "Gods Glory"

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## Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of preaching as a means to spread the glories of God and satisfy the spiritual hunger of believers. He highlights the problem of people filling themselves with worldly distractions like television, which diminishes their hunger for God's word. The pastor's main goal is to inspire a radical devotion to God, leading to a magnification of His glory and a transformation of hearts. He concludes that the ultimate aim of preaching, regardless of the text or topic, is to cultivate soul-satisfying, God-exalting worship.

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## Transcript

As I was looking over these three talks that are now on paper in front of me, I felt constrained to begin like this. What I have to say I believe is true, and I believe it is an important angle on preaching, but I'm just overwhelmed with the thought that it is one angle. And I want to say this up front, because when you start talking and the emotion comes, and you start saying things with strength, you can give the impression that you think what you have to say is the only thing that needs to be said in all the world about preaching.

And so I wanted to pull the plug on that mistake right now and say there's a hundred things that need to be said about preaching that I'm not going to say. And the question you need to ask as you listen with me is why did he say what he said to me now at this point in my life? Why did God set it up so that he came to Trinity now with me in my particular situation on this topic with those emphases and that particular dynamic? Why did God do this? That would be the question to ask yourself, I think, rather than saying, does he think that's the only thing that needs to be said, which it isn't. And I'd like to begin now with the prayer that God would help us maintain that careful perspective.

Oh, Father, I ask for your help now in these days together and in these messages, that you would protect these brothers and sisters from error and that you would blot out anything that has a bad emphasis or is

poorly stated or is just plain wrong. And what is true, I pray that the Holy Spirit would take it up, drive it home, and transform lives and ministries with it. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen. I want to begin with a question about the relationship between contemporary worship songs and preaching. I wonder if we would all agree, as I think the case is, that in the last 20 years or so there's been a phenomenal explosion of worship singing that is good.

Jack Hayford's Majesty, Graham Kendrick's Shine, Jesus Shine, hundreds of worship songs, which if I were to start singing them right now, you could all finish them. Thou art worthy. Father, I adore you.

Open our eyes, Lord. We worship and adore you. Thou, O Lord, art a shield about me.

You are Lord, you are Lord, you are risen from the dead. I could start 25 songs right now and every person in this room could finish them with me. And not only here, but all over the world.

It's a phenomenal thing. I was in Brazil two weeks ago. Brilha Jesus, Shine, Jesus Shine, is down there.

And so was Majesty. They're singing the same songs in Brazil. All over the world, this explosion of awakening in worship.

Now, some of the songs are poetically, grammatically, musically deplorable, which we should not make too much of if we grew up on Dulord. But one thing is unmistakable as a trend in these songs. By and large, they are God word.

They are God word. All the ones I listed up there were addressed directly to God, not sung about God in his presence, but to God in each other's presence. And therefore, these worship songs force the issue of authentic worship.

Are you right now engaging in a spiritual, authentic, genuine, real way with the living God? That's what those songs force as an issue on Sunday morning in a way that many of the old choruses that my parents and I sang did not force. Add this. The tunes that are being written today are very, very engaging tunes.

They have a way of awakening the affections. They're not excessively complex by and large or intellectual or demanding, but they catch up the emotions and the spirit in their mood. So two things are happening in the best worship songs.

If you don't like worship songs, be careful that you don't make the mistake of comparing the worst worship songs with the best hymns. It's not fair. Compare the best worship songs with the best hymns and the worst worship songs with the worst hymns, because there are a lot of lousy hymns just like there are a lot of lousy worship songs.

So be fair in your comparison and your critique of what's happening in worship. But in the best worship songs, two things are happening. The mind is being brought with God-centered lyrics in an amazing way into engagement with God, and the heart, stirred by these contemporary tunes, is being engaged with tenderness, devotion, enjoyment.

At least for millions of people this is true, even if not for a lot of musical classicists. So I look at this worship awakening, and what stands out above all things to me and strikes me and makes me ask questions is its God-centered lyrics. It's just amazing to me what's happening in the lyrics of contemporary worship songs.

God is exalted. He's Lord. He's risen from the dead.

He's majestic. He's mighty. He's holy.

He's conquered the power of death. He's a shield. He's glory.

He's the lifter of our heads. He's great. He's wonderful.

He's rock. He's fortress. He's deliverer.

He's the coming King, Redeemer, name above all names, Messiah, Lamb of God, Holy One. He is God, and our God reigns. It's an amazing thing what has happened in the lyrics of popular worship music.

It is an unmistakable thing. If you don't like the drums, if you don't like the guitars, if you don't like electricity, if you don't like platforms all cluttered with black microphones and boxes and everything and T-shirts, if you don't like that, you still have to admit that by and large the lyrics of this phenomenon are God-word. They are almost pure scripture again and again and again, even if clumsily set to the music.

And the hoped-for effect is a relentless addressing of God directly for the engagement of the heart. Now, here's a second fact to put over against that fact that raises my question. As I have observed this, I look at the preaching that follows this event for the last 20 years or so, and I find that the preaching is moving in exactly the opposite direction.

And I am floored to figure it out. While the worship songs have moved God-word, preaching has moved man-word. While worship songs focus our attention again and again on the character of God, the great works of God, the glory of God, preaching focuses again and again on contemporary issues, personal problems, relationships.

Worship songs focus our attention on the presence of God drawing near to us. Preaching gives advice on how to get along better on the earth. However we say it, and I'm not sure that I have said it well or can say it the way it needs to be said, I don't know anybody today, tell me if you're an exception to this, who would say that preaching has experienced the same phenomenon of God-word awakening that singing has over the last 20 years or so.

I don't know of any great resurgence of God-centeredness in preaching. I don't know of any great moving of the spirit of transcendence. I don't know of any profound God-wordness that pervades denominations by and large in American evangelicalism.

Rather, it seems to me that preaching would be characterized by relational, anecdotal, humorous, casual, laid-back, absorbed with human need, fixed on relational dynamics, heavily saturated with psychological categories, strategies for emotional healing. And my question is, why? Why this different development in the singing of our churches with lyrics that are God-word and preaching that is so man-word? Now, it's complex, and I don't know the whole explanation. But I want to try to commend a possible explanation that would account for why I have focused in these talks on what I have.

Why have preachers not followed the lead in worship music into a sustained focus on the greatness of God and the majesty of his name and the glory of his works? Why is the atmosphere of preaching so different from the atmosphere of these worship song lyrics? Here's a possible answer. The God-centered lyrics of worship songs have the great advantage over preaching that they are accompanied by music,

engaging music. The assumption is that the words of God-centeredness and God-exaltation would never in themselves hold the interest of the congregations except with the help of the emotionally charged and effective music.

Therefore, the music is what makes the God-centered lyrics palatable to contemporary evangelicals who are basically atheological. And without the music, the words would be considered dry and irrelevant and distant and unengaging. That's a negative way to describe it.

Here's a positive way. The positive way would be to say, the music really does, by God's divine appointment, I believe from scripture, have a way of opening the human spirit to at least recognize and affirm some of the true significance of the majesty of God. And therefore, the lyrics have the advantage of the accompanying help of the music to open the heart to receive the truth of the lyrics.

So whether you put it negatively and say the music makes God-centeredness palatable, or whether you put it positively and say that the music, by God's design, opens the spirit to receive and affirm the truth of the God-centered lyrics, however you put it, the preacher knows he's got no help. There's nobody playing any background music, and there's nobody humming or there's no synthesizer playing while he's preaching. He's got to go it alone with his words.

And yet, almost every preacher wants to accomplish what that music accomplishes. Rightly so. He wants the heart to be open.

He wants the emotions to be stirred. He doesn't just want to persuade intellectual assent in his preaching. He wants people's hearts to be moved and broken and reach out and embrace the truth emotionally, to be transformed to the depth, not just at the superficial cognitive level.

It's not wrong for a preacher to want to happen through his preaching what happens through those worship songs. And yet he knows doctrine, theological portraits of God, transcendence, he thinks. And this is a faithful and mistaken judgment, I believe.

He thinks, won't hold them, won't move them, won't awaken them. The only thing that will verbally do to a congregation what musically is done in worship songs is not a message about God, but a message about divorce, or drugs, or parenting, or anger, or success, or intimacy, or pain. In other words, the common strategy of preachers today for awakening people's emotions, and that's almost a given, we must have affirmation in their faces.

We must feel that they're with us. The common strategy for achieving that without music is to choose themes and topics that already have the emotions running. It's already there.

The trigger is wired. If you just touch it, the emotions go off. And all preachers know what those topics are and where that pain is in their people's hearts.

It may be the pain in marriage. It may be the anguish of wayward teenagers. It may be stress at work.

It may be the power of sexual temptation. It may be the breakdown of community or the woundedness of old abuses. It may be the absence of intimacy.

The preacher knows if he plants his sermon there, and with just a modest ability of anecdote and illustration, and especially some personal vulnerability, he's got them. He's got them, and he's

accomplishing what the music accomplishes. Empathy, you'll see in their faces, and he will be glad with their attentiveness.

Now, right at this point, you can either put this in a negative or a positive light. You can say positively. That's great.

I mean, at least preaching knows where people hurt. At least we're not just talking into the air. At least the preaching is connecting, which is a good thing.

It's a good thing. Preaching that does not empathize with people's pain and connect with where they are will not produce biblical fruit, period. But there's a negative spin to put on this as well.

I'm going to put the negative spin on it. The negative spin is that the reason preachers don't believe that the greatness of God and the atmosphere of transcendence and the glory and majesty of Christ and the deep things of the Spirit will not move and awaken and hold the people is because they do not move Him. The preacher's heart is not engaged in that way.

What are the books that he's reading? They're not books about God, by and large. Just go to the bookstores and ask. Take your surveys and see what preachers are buying.

What awakens him? What is he reading? Books about anger? Books about intimacy? Books about marriage? Books about success? Books about how-to strategies? Books about what makes the church work? What makes the preacher's juices flow these days, it seems, is psychological angle on dysfunction in the family, a new strategy for mobilizing the laypeople, a new tactic for time management, and most of all, a fresh approach for dealing with depression and some empathetic treatment with his own pain and abuse after being beat up for ten years by carnal laypeople. That's what pastors really want to read about and talk about. Not the inexhaustible riches of Christ.

Not books about the glories of God's character. My explanation of why preaching is going this way and worship lyrics are going this way is paradoxically that preachers really are trying to go the same way. They really want to accomplish in their preaching the same thing that is happening in the worship music.

They know they don't have the help of the music, and therefore to accomplish the same thing that's being accomplished over here with the help of the music, they cannot do with doctrine, God, theology, and transcendence. They know they have to take people with the itch that they have and scratch it so that they quicken the emotion that's already there since they can't awaken it with God, and they move manward. My own sense is that this tension can't last.

It can't last very long. It's not going to go on, this tension between preaching and worship lyrics. Either God-centered worship singing is going to come down or preaching has got to come up.

My aim in these messages is to plead that preaching come up. And when I say come up, I don't mean come up away from the pain. Of the people.

I mean come up with the pain of the people into the presence of God whose glory, whose revelation is the bottom line only answer for that pain. No matter what all the strategies are given and all the hopeless sessions I had, the bottom line is, will the glory of God be revealed in this family. The aim of preaching, no less than singing, is God-exalting worship.

Not only that, my conviction is, and that's why I asked for this title, that true biblical preaching is worship. It is worship. In other words, in the same way that a melody or a tune can awaken us to the true beauty of God in the lyrics, so there is a music in here.

There is a music in the soul of the pastor which he sings over the glory of the God that he's seen the word that will awaken the people. It will when he's singing. When they can hear the song of the preacher through the transcendent words that he speaks, they will be awakened.

And if that song isn't there, he's right. They will not. The phrase that I have used to define preaching in this series is, it is expository exaltation.

That's my definition of preaching. Preaching is expository exaltation. Not with an A, but with a U. Exaltation.

And when both of those happen, the people will join you in worship. Now, someone might say at this point, Oh, wait a minute. What's wrong with 30 minutes of lingering in God-centered singing and then 30 minutes of God's word addressed to human beings? You describe it like it's a problem.

What's wrong with it? Sounds okay to me. Here's the problem I see in it. Preaching is meant by God to catch people up into worship and not be a practical application after worship.

These three messages are meant to defend that. The aim of preaching is dealing with divorce worshipfully for God's sake. The aim of preaching is to deal with teenagers worshipfully for the glory of God.

The aim of preaching is to deal with anger in family systems worshipfully for the glory of God. Preaching exists to magnify God and exalt his centrality in all of life. And if that doesn't happen, I don't think it's Christian preaching.

I'm going to give you three reasons. Three reasons for believing that. Number one, I believe that preaching is designed to quicken and awaken and sustain the centrality of God in people's affections because the Bible teaches that everything is to be done for that purpose.

And preaching is part of everything. 1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do everything that God might be worshiped. That is, to the glory of God.

I don't know how you can believe that and not make the magnifying of the glory of God the aim especially of preaching. Or, whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Everything is to be done to highlight the centrality of God.

Everything in life is to be done to magnify the glory and magnificence and beauty of God. How much more than the preaching of the word of God must have that as its ultimate aim and its pervasive theme. Therefore, my first argument is the Bible says do everything to bring people to glorify God, to magnify the wonder and beauty and loveliness and all sufficiency of God.

Do everything and therefore do preaching in order to cultivate the cherishing of God and the wonder of God and the being satisfied in God. That's argument number one. Here's argument number two.

God himself says that he does everything he does for his own glory and for the exalting of his own name. And preaching is one of the great things that God does. The banner that flies over every act that God has ever performed is Isaiah 48, 11.

For my own sake, for my own sake I act. How can my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another. That's the banner that flies over every act God has ever performed, including preaching.

And if we don't live under that banner and wave that banner over our preaching, we strive against God. He predestined us and chose us for his glory, Ephesians 1, 6. He saved us for his glory, Ephesians 1, 14. He created us for his glory, Isaiah 43, 7. He sanctifies us for his glory, 2 Thessalonians 1, 12.

All that God does, he does to hold up and magnify and glorify his own great name. Preaching is one of the things that God does. It is a great thing that God does, and he does it for this purpose, and therefore we must devote ourselves to preaching in such a way as to bring people to value and cherish and be satisfied in God.

Argument number three, and finally. Preaching exalts the centrality of God because the appointed end of preaching in the New Testament is again and again said to be faith. And the heart and essence of saving faith is a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus.

And a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus is a magnifying of God, because God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. And when God is magnified through our being satisfied, that is worship. And therefore when the New Testament teaches that the aim of preaching is faith, it means worship.

Let me just show you some texts so you can hang your thoughts on these and see if this is so. Romans 10, 14. How shall they believe, there's faith, in him whom they've not heard? How shall they hear without a preacher? So there's the connection between faith and preaching.

And he says it again in verse 17. So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Or 1 Corinthians 1.21. Since in the wisdom of God the world did not know God through wisdom, God was pleased through the foolishness of preaching to save those who believed.

So there's the connection again. Preaching and faith. One more.

1 Corinthians 2.4.5. My message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit and power that your faith, there it is again, should not rest on the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. So in those three texts at least, and there are more, preaching is brought into connection with faith as that which is to flow out of preaching. When you preach, from whatever text and on whatever theme, the goal is to beget and sustain faith.

Now why? Have you ever asked yourself that question, why God has ordained that salvation be by faith alone? Why is faith so central? And I believe the answer is because faith, more than any other human act, humbles man and magnifies the all-sufficiency of God. And I get that from Romans 4.20, where Paul brags on Abraham as the model of the believer, the one who has faith, like this. Abraham grew strong in his faith, giving glory to God.

I believe that's a modal participle. That is, the way you give glory to God is by trusting him and vice versa, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. And here's my conclusion from that, and I'll give you one other text to support this.

The heart and soul of saving faith is the spiritual apprehension of the glory of God in Jesus Christ. And the embracing of all that God is for us in Christ to the satisfaction of the thirst of our souls. That's saving faith.

Parenthesis, it's the failure to understand that meaning of faith, which is at the bottom of the lordship controversy. You cannot believe like that and not obey. By definition, close parenthesis, faith in its essence is a spiritual apprehension of the glory of God in Christ and a being drawn into embracing that and all that God is for us in Christ to the satisfaction of our own soul's thirst.

Now here's the other text that I said would support this understanding of faith, which is the aim of preaching, which means that the aim of preaching is worship. John 6, 35. Jesus said, I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst. Believing in John's theology is a coming to Jesus so to drink that you cease thirsting for sin. The power of satisfaction that comes from seeing all that God is for us in Christ and embracing it by faith severs the power of sin by a superior satisfaction.

Faith in Jesus Christ is a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus. When you experience that, you magnify his preciousness. If you asked me for a sentence that would sum up my theology, it would be this.

God is most glorified in you when you are most satisfied in him. And therefore my task as a preacher, gloriously, does not have to choose between magnifying God and satisfying my people. The only way God will ever be magnified is if they are satisfied in him.

Oh, how mistaken preachers are when they say this church would get along better if people would come here to give instead of to get. It's wrong! My job as a pastor and in this whole service is to spread a banquet table of the glories of God. That's what we talk about this afternoon.

To spread a banquet table of the glories of God for my people to come starved to eat. And their problem is not that they come to get instead of to give. The problem is that they stuff themselves with the white bread of television so that when they see the banquet of God's glory spread, they are not hungry anymore.

But that doesn't change your job. Your job is to give glory to the end that those hearts are so satisfied that TV goes, lying goes, immorality goes, cheating goes, money grabbing goes, and what comes is a radical devotion to God so that we can magnify or maximize the joy that we have in Him. So let me sum it up and close like this.

The aim of preaching is this kind of faith. Faith that is a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus. And a being satisfied with all that God is for us in Jesus magnifies God.

How do you magnify a fountain? Drink! Drink and thirst for nothing else. It magnifies Him and that magnifying of God is worship. And therefore, my conclusion this morning is the aim and the ultimate goal of all preaching from every text and in every topic is soul-satisfying, God-exalting worship.

Almighty God and Heavenly Father, I beg you by the power of your Spirit that you would come and perform worship in these hearts by begetting a hunger and a thirst that may have dried up a long time ago or has been made dead by television, a Tom Clancy novel, and wasted efforts in money-seeking. I pray that you would break hearts and that you would cleanse and that you would quicken a desire for yourself and that in that, oh God, you would get glory as the fountain of living water and that you would receive worship and that you would transform preaching. I ask this for our own soul's sake and for the glory of your name, through Jesus Christ, your Son.

Amen.

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