**Expository Exultation**

**By John Piper**

John Piper wrote *Expository Exultation* is Piper’s third book in a series about Scripture. The book is primarily theological in nature. It is different than other books on preaching because it does not seek to provide preachers with different techniques for preaching or homiletical methods. Piper’s main concern is to present the idea that “preaching is worship” (p. 16). Not only is preaching worship, in Piper’s view, but is also “serves” worship (p. 25). Piper dedicates his book to Martyn Lloyd–Jones, because “he knew the great aim of preaching is the white–hot worship of God’s people” (p. 14).

Though Piper does not provide a precise thesis for his book, the purpose for his work is stated in a question: “If the Bible is completely true and is to be read supernaturally in the pursuit of worship, what does it mean to preach this word and how should we do it?” Therefore, preaching is worship. Piper defines worship: This is worship: to act in a way that shows the heart’s valuing of the glory of God and the name of the Lord Jesus (p. 27).” The book is divided into six different parts, which attempt to make the case for “expository exultation.” Piper contends that expository exultation is “preaching as worship”(p. 53).

For Piper, preaching means a combination of explanation (of the text) and exultation (worship). He writes, “Exultation without explanation is not preaching. Explanation without exultation is no preaching.” Piper believes preaching contains four roots: historical, Scripture, faith, and human transformation. But most importantly preaching has a Trinitarian root. Part three and four are complementary and seek to answer the question of how preaching becomes a means of the miracle of worship supernaturally and naturally. He answers, “How do the supernatural and the natural intersect in the act of preaching? The emphasis will be on the fact that God intends for preachers to make the fullest use of their natural powers in preaching , even though the aim is to waken and sustain worship that is possible only in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit.

Piper makes the case that if preaching is to accomplish its purpose in exultation one must pay close attention to the text. However, he points out that “the content of preaching, in its essence, is not the biblical text, but the reality that the text communicates” (p. 160). In other words, the preacher must show his audience how he makes his conclusions from the text of the Bible. Or in Piper’s own words, “showing how the reality shines through the words of the passage.” As the biblical words of the text are exposed, the preacher leads the congregation to worship God.

Part six of the book contains Piper’s most substantial explanation of expository exultation. In reversed order, Piper makes the case for expository exultation first from the New Testament in part six and then from the Old Testament in part seven. His goal in part six is to show how God is glorified through preaching, how the sermon should highlight Christ’s saving goal through the cross, and ultimately lead the saints unto obedience to God. Part seven aims to continue to champion each of these characteristics of preaching while trying to answer the question of whether or not Christ crucified can be preached from Old Testament texts. Piper answers in the positive, affirming that the preacher must carefully treat the text in its context while aiming to point believers to the new covenant we have in Christ. Expository exultation is God’s intention to lead his people to the wonder of worship. Preaching should lead God’s people to savor him more. Piper concludes, “Therefore, if the glorification of God is the ultimate goal, preaching will seek to be as effective as it can be in clarifying the people’s understanding of the glory of God and enflaming their hearts to love it. (p. 201)

**Critique:**

Piper believes preaching is utmost importance for the church because he equates preaching with worship. In fact, he makes definitive statements about preaching such as “preaching is worship” (p. 16) or “worship is knowing, enjoying, and showing the glory of God” (p. 44). Piper’s use of absolutes, however, is not fully helpful. For instance, he says on the one hand that God appointed preaching “in worship,” but then later declares that “preaching is worship.” One is left to wonder at times if indeed preaching is worship or part of a worship service. Though partly confusing, Piper makes a forceful and successful argument for preaching as an act that should be aimed at glorifying, or exulting, God.

Piper makes the claim that preaching contains an evangelistic thrust. However, preaching is meant to serve primarily the church, not unbelievers (p. 54). One of the strengths from Piper’s arguments throughout the book is his thorough examination of the various terms for preaching in the New Testament. It is in fact through the examination of biblical terminology that he concludes the terms for preaching give credence to the idea that preaching is meant for the gathered church. Piper is a man steeped in the Scripture. Another one of the strengths of his book is his treatment of the Bible, which is far from superficial. He examines preaching not only as a theme in the New Testament but also the Old. The evidence he presents for preaching is biblically grounded, not just his opinion.

*Expository Exultation* is a helpful tool for pastors looking to make the case that preaching holds a very special place in church life. Piper minces no words to show the important of preaching for God’s people. For him, however, preaching must be expository. By expository he means, “What makes it expository is not that there is only one text but that the preaching is actually from biblical texts, and that their true meaning is “brought out and exposed to view” (p. 52). His method is expository in nature, and his sermon delivery is deliberate. He actually shares a helpful tool for preachers that he calls A.P.T.A.T, which stands for Admit. Pray. Trust. Act. Thank. This simple tool may prove to be one of the most helpful takeaways from the book.

Perhaps one of Piper’s most significant weaknesses is the way the book is organized. The distribution of chapters is random, and some of it repetitive. For instance, he could have combined chapter thirteen and fourteen, and chapter nineteenth through twenty–one and shortened the content. Piper is wordy. He uses titles like “How Does Preaching Become a Means of the Miracle of Worship – Naturally” or “Rigorous Attention to the Text for the Sake of Radical Penetration into Reality.” Why not use the title “Paying Close Attention to the text”? or something similar? Overall, one can get lost the jargon he uses. Though his book can be read by the non–trained mind, some of the discussions of certain Bible terms can be tedious and lengthy.

Anyone looking for treatise on a theological foundation for preaching will find Piper’s book helpful. He is above all a pastor–theologian. He is passionate about the glory of God and uses examples from men, including his hero Jonathan Edwards, Greg Beale, and James Hamilton, that too place great emphasis on God’s glory as the ultimate goal in creation (i.e., p. 278). For those looking for a manual for preaching, Piper’s book will disappoint. For a book of this size and scope, very few references from other homileticians are offered. However, there are plenty of biblical references throughout. In fact, he references almost every single book of the New Testament. One cannot help but conclude that Piper takes preaching seriously. He is forceful about making the case that if preaching is worship, that there is no room for laziness or incompetence from preachers committed the exposition of the Bible (see. p. 165 and p. 183).

**Significant Quotes:**

* This third volume, Expository Exultation, now asks, If the Bible is completely true and is to be read supernaturally in the pursuit of worship, what does it mean to preach this word, and how should we do it? (p. 14)
* God has appointed preaching in worship, I will argue, as one great means of accomplishing his ultimate goal in the world. (p. 15)
* The title Expository Exultation is intended to communicate that this unique form of communication is both a rigorous intellectual clarification of the reality revealed through the words of Scripture and a worshipful embodiment of the value of that reality in the preacher’s exultation over the word he is clarifying. (p. 16)
* I will argue that preaching is worship. And preaching serves worship. (p. 16)
* The Bible exists for the glory of God, now and forever. Reading it and preaching it share that goal. (p. 17)
* The aim of preaching is that our people see these realities for themselves in the text. (p. 19)
* This is a book about preaching in worship. I am hoping to show that preaching is worship and serves worship. (p. 25)
* This is worship: to act in a way that shows the heart’s valuing of the glory of God and the name of the Lord Jesus. (p. 27)
* The essence of worship is experiencing Christ as more gain than all that life can give. (p. 29)
* The inner essence of worship is prizing Christ—cherishing him, treasuring him, being satisfied with him. (p. 30)
* Calling the praises of God’s people “good” and “pleasant” and “fitting” means that their praises in private and “in the great congregation” are not random. They are not arbitrary or capricious. (p. 33)
* Worship is knowing, enjoying, and showing the glory of God. Edification is one way of showing why and how we know and value God. (p. 44)
* I conclude, therefore, that it is beautifully fitting for the people of Christ to gather regularly for corporate worship. By “worship,” I mean a radically God-centered, Christ-exalting experience of knowing, treasuring, and expressing the glory of God through Jesus Christ. (p. 45)
* What is it about preaching that makes it so important for that gathering? My answer is that preaching itself is worship and is appointed by God to awaken and intensify worship. (p. 51)
* My term for preaching is expository exultation. (p. 51)
* There can be more than one text for a sermon. In other words, exposition can be done thematically and topically … What makes it expository is not that there is only one text but that the preaching is actually from biblical texts, and that their true meaning is “brought out and exposed to view.” (p. 52)
* The Devil can do biblical exposition—even speaking true propositions about the text’s meaning. But the Devil cannot exult over the divine glory of the meaning of Scripture. He hates it. So he cannot preach—not the way I am defining it. (p. 53)
* Therefore, both *euangelizomai* and *kēryssō*, as the primary words behind the English “preach” in the New Testament, describe a kind of speech that involves more than the transfer of information or the explanation of truth that is coming from another source. They both signify a kind of speech that accords with good news, great import, and significant authority. (p. 56)
* Of course, the preaching must not be dead. It must not be bookish. But it must be book-derived. Book-faithful. Book-saturated. Book-balanced. (p. 62)
* Wherever emotions are strong without some truth to warrant them, we call this “emotionalism” and put no value on it. And wherever beautiful and valuable truth about God is clear and there is little response of the heart, God is dishonored. (p. 94)
* Preaching is uniquely suited to the corporate worship of God’s people because it wakens worship and is worship. (p. 96)
* Woe to the pastor who chastises his people for “coming to get” and not to give. If what the hungry people are coming to get is God, their hunger magnifies the worth of God’s soul-satisfying beauty. (p. 99)
* Expository exultation corresponds to the nature of corporate worship. Its content and its demeanor are suited, by God’s design, to restore and enlarge our knowledge of God (expository) and to restore and enlarge our passion for God (exultation). (p. 102)
* Preaching aims to bring about the spiritual sight of the glories of God in Christ. It aims to awaken and sustain the spiritual “taste” that God is supremely beautiful and satisfying. (p. 103)
* In other words, without the sovereign, life-giving, blindness-removing, heart-illumining, glory-revealing work of God’s Spirit, preaching, as expository exultation, cannot achieve its aims—indeed it cannot exist. (p. 105)
* A.P.T.A.T. stands for Admit. Pray. Trust. Act. Thank. Those are the steps I think we are to take as we seek the “supply of the Spirit” for the act of preaching. (p. 109)
* In answer to the question of how the human act of preaching can waken worship, if worship is a work of God, we answered that the preacher admits his helplessness, prays for divine power, trusts the promises of God for supernatural intervention, does the human act of preaching, and then thanks God. (p. 123)
* A pastor’s preaching should be marked by lucid thinking, and over time he should draw his people into the habit of thinking carefully about the meaning of Scripture. (p. 126)
* Our preaching is not aiming at mere information transfer, or mere persuasion of doctrinal truths, or mere human excitement about God. We are aiming at authentic, Spirit-given experience of God himself—in this case, as Paul calls it here, the pouring out of God’s love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). (p. 135)
* But our aim is what only the Holy Spirit can do—the supernatural experience of the love of God in the hearts of our listeners. We aim for them to see and savor and show the beauty and worth of this love. The glory of preaching is that, even though we cannot make this happen by our own effort, since it is the work of the Holy Spirit, he will spare no effort to clarify the beauty and worth of the historical facts and the theological interpretations. (p. 137)
* There is a way to preach—a way of eloquence or cleverness or human wisdom—that nullifies the cross. We should dread nullifying the cross. (p. 140)
* The ultimate goal of Scripture: that God’s infinite worth and beauty would be exalted in the everlasting, white-hot worship of the blood-bought bride of Christ from every people, language, tribe, and nation. (p. 159)
* I am pleading against a widespread kind of preaching that is Bible based but not Bible saturated. I am pleading against the reading of a text followed by preaching that makes its points—sometimes very good points actually found in the text—without showing people the very words and phrases from which the points are taken. (p. 180)
* if the ultimate goal of all Scripture (and every text) is that God be glorified—this will have a significant effect on how a preacher chooses what to say about his text.  (p. 201)
* Therefore, if the glorification of God is the ultimate goal, preaching will seek to be as effective as it can be in clarifying the people’s understanding of the glory of God and enflaming their hearts to love it. (p. 201)
* Therefore, the cross is the foundation in every sermon of every good offered in every text. (p. 231)
* Every sermon is a salvation sermon for every believer. (p. 243)
* Christian preaching aims to bring people to see and savor the glories of all that God is for them in Jesus. It aims at worship—in all of life forever. (p. 286)