



# WORD TO THE WORLD

The Collected Writings of  
William S. Barker



**MENTOR**





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**William S. Barker** (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University) was until his retirement Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). With other degrees from Princeton University, Cornell University and Covenant Theological Seminary he has taught at Covenant College and continues as Adjunct Professor of Church History at Covenant Theological Seminary. He was editor of the *Presbyterian Journal* and has contributed to the *Dictionary of Christianity in America*.





## PREFACE

Re-reading one's writings produced over more than thirty years, one is struck with gratitude for sound teaching received from abundant sources by the grace of God. Insofar as these articles and lectures may be beneficial, they reflect the influence upon me, first, of godly parents (Theodore R. and Nancy Edwards Barker) and of brothers, both older (Edward T. Barker, M.D.) and younger (Nicholas P. Barker, Ph.D.). Then there were teachers, such as E. Harris Harbison at Princeton and T. E. Mommson at Cornell; but especially formative were the Covenant Seminary faculty: Wilber B. Wallis, R. Laird Harris, Robert G. Rayburn, J. Oliver Buswell, Jr., and those who were my pastors as well as teachers: Elmer B. Smick, Donald J. MacNair, Francis A. Schaeffer, and pre-eminently John W. Sanderson, Jr., who was also a colleague and mentor at both Covenant College and Seminary. There are other former colleagues who still exercise a special influence upon my thought and life: Rudolph F. Schmidt, David C. Jones, and David B. Calhoun of Covenant College and Seminary and D. Clair Davis, Samuel T. Logan, Jr., Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., Sinclair B. Ferguson, William Edgar, Vern





## Word to the Worlds

Poythress, and Manuel Ortiz of Westminster Seminary. Former students, too, have contributed to the shaping of my thinking and ministry: Randy Nabors, Ron Lutjens (my current pastor), Philip G. Ryken, and Bryan Chapell (now President of Covenant Seminary), among many others. I am profoundly grateful to our Lord for the benefits of relationships with such servants of his. Most of all, I am thankful for my wife Gail, and daughter Anne Barker, son Matt and his wife Ginny, and our four grandchildren, Susannah, Elizabeth, Seth, and Mary. Truly, 'the lines have fallen for me in pleasant places' (Psalm 16).

If there is a unifying theme to these several articles and addresses, it is the power and authority of the Scriptures, the very written Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice, as the Spirit employs them in the church, whose Confessional tradition, embodying the system of doctrine contained in the Scriptures, guides her in speaking the gospel of truth in love into the fallen and needy world. God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, and Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself for us. Now the Spirit who has brought the saving gospel to us, down through the centuries of history and across oceans and continents, impels us to convey this marvelous message of salvation through the crucified and risen King Jesus to all the world and to the generations yet to come until Jesus returns.

I wish to thank editor and friend Malcolm Maclean and all those involved at Christian Focus Publications for making it possible for me to spread my humble version of this marvelous message to still more potential readers and hearers and doers of the Word.

*Will Barker*





# PART I

## THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN SOCIETY







I

## THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS AND THE PREPARATION OF HIS SERVANTS

Last month the Voyager II spacecraft was launched on what is planned to be a 1.4 billion-mile journey to Jupiter by 1979, to Saturn by 1980, and perhaps to Uranus by 1986 – it is to transmit the first live TV pictures from that far out in our solar system before plunging farther into interstellar space. One scientist has termed the spacecraft ‘a bottle cast into the cosmic ocean’, for it also contains a recording called ‘The Sounds of Earth’. It is as though mankind were reaching out, in case we on earth should not survive, in a pathetic and noble hope that there is some other life out there somewhere.

We who believe in God the Father Almighty and in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord, who was crucified, dead, and buried, who rose again on the third day from the dead, ascended into heaven, and is coming again to judge the living and the dead – we are firmly persuaded that there is life – divine life – ‘out there,’ and that the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob entered this earthly life incarnate in the historic person Jesus of Nazareth, who, having lived the only sinless human life, offered that life on the cross as the spotless Lamb of God, as the sacrifice for the sins of all who put their trust and

II







## Word to the World

only hope for forgiveness in Him. Our commission, as those associated with Covenant Seminary, is to prepare servants of Jesus because He is Lord of all.

Our text in Matthew 28, usually referred to as 'the Great Commission,' is ordinarily associated with world missions rather than with theological education. All of the work of the entire Church, however, is properly to be related to this commission. This is why Matthew, who begins his Gospel by linking the birth of Jesus to the historic line from Abraham through David and the Babylonian Captivity, concludes it on this note of the work of the risen Jesus going on through His servants to the end of history.

Our commission in seminary education, indeed, the commission of the entire Church, is founded on the confession that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Jesus introduced His commission with the astounding declaration: 'All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Me.' If we do not face the implications of this claim, we cannot honestly identify ourselves as Christians.

What is the basis for such a statement and for our confession of it? Paul said in Romans 1:4 that Jesus was 'declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection'. It is the unique triumph over death and the sin that produces death that manifestly proclaims Jesus as Lord. Peter preached that 'salvation is found in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.' Here in our text we are told that the eleven, when they saw Jesus, worshipped Him. Jewish disciples, the strength of whose monotheistic faith would regard as blasphemy the worship of one less than deity, bowed before this One, even though, as we shall note later, some doubted. And Jesus' commission includes the Trinitarian formula for baptism that joins the Son with the Father and the Spirit in the name of the one God.





### The Lordship of Jesus and the Preparation of His Servants

All authority has been given to Jesus not only in heaven but also on earth. He is exclusively Head of His Church. Our Scottish Presbyterian tradition has emphasized the kingly prerogatives of Christ, seeking to maintain a direct conscious connection between the Christian and his Lord apart from intermediaries, be they political, ecclesiastical, or spiritual. Even the Father and Holy Spirit focus our attention on the glory of the Son as our Lord.

Jonathan Edwards, while still a young man at Yale College, meditated upon that ascription of praise to the Lord in 1 Timothy 1:17: 'Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be glory and honor forever and ever.' Jonathan Edwards, in the eighteenth century, recalled later how a sense of the sweetness of the sovereignty of the Lord came upon him as he meditated upon the text: 'He is the Lord.'

The name 'Covenant' was chosen for our seminary because our covenant theology views God through Scripture and history as the Sovereign who graciously initiates a covenant, a provision for our redemption from sin, our eternal life. The great commission is a statement of the Sovereign's covenant with His people. It calls for a response of commitment to the lordship of Him to whom all authority is given in heaven and earth. This is the basis for our attempting to provide theological education – Jesus is Lord and we are glad to be known as His servants, prepared to do His bidding.

The substance of Jesus' commission begins with a 'therefore'. On the basis of His authority we go and make disciples of *all* nations. His exclusive uniqueness as risen Lord means that He is the one Lord not only for individual believers but also for all the world, and everyone is to be sought for discipleship to the one Master.

This involves 'baptizing them into the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit'. Our spiritual union with the triune





## Word to the World

God is of initial and essential importance. Certainly we cannot make disciples of others until we ourselves have sealed our commitment to Christ and have been sealed by Him. Our spiritual formation is of prior importance to our task of service. This requires faith, which is more than knowledge and mental assent, but that deep heart's trust that was the experience of Martin Luther after many spiritual struggles. It is that faith which can only be the gift of God's grace, for which, like Augustine, we cry out to God in the penitent humility of the abject sinner. It is that faith which, as Paul says, is a gift of God, and so we can only thankfully receive it. Baptism exhibits the grace of God who on the basis of the atonement of Christ's death on the cross seals His servants unto Himself.

Our making disciples also involves teaching: 'teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.' Having been made disciples by God's teaching we gratefully and joyously seek to make others to be Jesus' disciples. This teaching involves obedience. Discipleship means recognition of Jesus as Master, by whose words our lives are governed. This involves all His precepts and practices. This is why we contend so earnestly for the inerrancy and infallible authority of Scripture. It is because Jesus our Lord taught it, and denial of the Bible's truthfulness is denial of our Lord. But much more than a testimony to Scripture is involved in discipleship to Jesus: we must find our very motivation for life in all the commands and example of our Lord, which represent the culmination of Scriptural revelation.

Such disciples are to be made out of all nations. Christ's lordship sweeps over all the world, cutting across all distinctions of geography, politics, culture, race, or class. Paul says in Ephesians 4 that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. There is only one Church for all nations. But the one Church is still the Church, defined by its commitment to the one Lord. There is that





## The Lordship of Jesus and the Preparation of His Servants

which is *not* church. There are those who speak of the *myth* of God incarnate. There are those who deny the bodily resurrection of Christ in the name of 'levelling with the public'. But the early testimony of Christian faith is as follows: 'If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile. You are still in your sins' (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). This was Paul, who could say to King Agrippa, within living memory of the empty tomb, that these things were not done in a corner. The unity of the Church depends upon the purity of the Church as the faithful Bride of Christ.

Peter at the end of John 6 gives a testimony that brings home this point. Christ had just spoken of the need for eating His body and drinking His blood. On hearing this saying, many who followed Him said: 'This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?' 'Does this offend you?' asked Jesus. 'What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before? The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you, they are Spirit and they are life, yet there are some of you who do not believe.' Then He asked the Twelve: 'Do you want to leave too?' Simon Peter answered Him: 'Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.' It is on that basis that we go and make disciples, because Jesus is Lord and the only Lord for all the nations!

Knowing our frame, Jesus concludes His commission with these words of comfort: 'And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.' To accomplish our task, the one body must be filled with the one Spirit, the Holy Spirit, who is also called the Spirit of Christ. I say to those who profess Jesus as Lord: we must also manifest His Spirit if we are to be His servants. 'All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.'





## Word to the World

We noticed earlier that although the eleven worshipped, it is recorded that some doubted. Could Thomas still doubt, who upon viewing the risen Lord with the nailprints in His hands had exclaimed: 'My Lord and my God'? Could Andrew or Philip or Matthew himself, or Peter, James, or John? Yes, they could still doubt, because seeing and hearing are not believing – we must admit we feel that ambivalent pull: 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.' Faith does come by the hearing of the Word of God – but it requires the Spirit's effectual calling as well. Our spirit may be willing, but our flesh, our fallen human nature, is so weak. We need the Spirit of Christ! It is time that we recognized that our skepticism is not so much a product of our modern, enlightened culture that tends to dissociate the reality of God from what we experience as history and science. Rather our modern skepticism is a product of our fallen human nature, which only the Spirit can overcome.

Jesus assures us of His presence to the very end of the age. Our Lord has said to His servants, 'I shall never leave you nor forsake you' (Heb. 13:5; Deut. 31; Josh. 1). That is our need, that is our confidence. His lordship is our authority, His presence is our power. What a standing we have as servants of such a Lord!

As I meditated upon my calling, I was reminded by one the trustees yesterday of Joshua. Another one reminded me of the Abrahamic promises. 'God will be our God and we shall be His people' is echoed all the way through the Bible. I have been reflecting also upon Moses as he said to the Lord, 'If thy presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here.' We dare not go unless the Spirit of Christ fills us, goes with us, and leads us.

What kind of theological education is called for to carry out this great commission? It must be in the name





### The Lordship of Jesus and the Preparation of His Servants

of Jesus, because He is Lord of all. There must be worship of and commitment to Him as the only Lord. There must be scholarly learning of all that He has taught and disciplined obedience to Him as Master. There must be a dependence on the presence of His Spirit, which will manifest itself in the same kind of loving self-sacrifice that was the life of our Lord Jesus. 'As the Father has sent me,' He said, 'so send I you.' Be it ever our highest joy to be faithful servants of Jesus Christ. May we enter into blessing with his words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant,' on that great and final day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

