

# Try to Determine

by Rolfe Barnard

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*Rolfe Barnard's sermon challenges Christians to engage actively with contemporary issues through a foundation in Scripture and a living relationship with Christ.*

**Duration:** 36:21

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

**Topics:** "Gospel"

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## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the profound truth that Jesus is both Lord and Messiah, emphasizing the importance of answering to Him. The speaker mentions the need for a demonstration of the Spirit and power, rather than relying on human wisdom. The sermon also addresses the challenge to Christ's sovereignty and power in the world today. The speaker shares a personal experience of being challenged in his own preaching and highlights the importance of staying true to the message of Christ's sacrifice.

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## Transcript

I have the honor to be the evangelist for this church, have been for many years. It's interesting that much emphasis is being placed these days on what a church is. And one characteristic of a New Testament church would be that it would have an evangelist.

But most of us don't, and so I'm glad that every month I get a check from this church, just like by a missionary in Africa or somewhere, and it helps me, and it helps them, and it would help your church if you would just quit picking your texts that you like and begin to pay a little attention to the book. We've had a Bible with us quite a while, but we don't pay greatly attention to it. It's always a joy to be in this pulpit.

We've had a lot of battles here back in the old days. We've seen lots of water run under the bridges. This is the 14th or 15th session of the first church, I guess, in America.

I have an annual conference basically around the initial and foundational truth that Christ is a life-giving spirit. Will you turn to the book of 1 Corinthians, chapter 2? I am not to teach this morning one of the most profound teachers under God's earth, or under God's sky, is Brother E. W. Johnson. I know what I'd do if he could send me that little paper.

I'd get a lot of that stuff and work it over and fix it up so it's right, that I can get one of his papers and preach a year from it, and what he preaches in one message. And I don't know, I thank God for him. And

what that little one-eyed Jew over in Jerusalem done this last week, made a premonition out of him.

I told him that little Jew didn't come over and conquer America before he got through this morning. But we've seen history in the last few days. I was a little bothered when Brother Johnson announced his text from 1 Corinthians.

I said, oh, oh, down in Texas with Brother Jackson, Coots, and these brethren here, last February we had a conference and had a fool preacher down there named McDonald. He preached there last year. And he had three messages in the morning and three at night.

I never got so religious in all of my life. I'll tell you what's a fact. Anybody who hasn't got more sense than that ought to be shocked.

And I was the last speaker of the last time, and a certain preacher named LeMahan got up and announced my sermon. I came with my message all prepared. I was going to preach on why Christ died.

And of course I had an Orthodox sermon. It's just three points. That's all you can have if you're going to be Orthodox.

And this fool LeMahan got up and preached four points. One of them I found not to be so. And I had to sit there while he was popping off and get me another message.

And I called him a thief publicly, and I fixed to call you on, Brother Johnson, except the fact that I'd come just for a word of agitation. Let me read the first three or four verses of the 2nd chapter of the 1st book of Corinthians. And I sat there and said, maybe this will be a conference.

I don't know whether we've had any like it or not, where only one thing is said. And the first speaker has certainly hit it right square dab in the face. And if we could get one thing said and believed in our hearts and translate from public profession to practical practice, that'd be a conference that God Almighty would be greatly pleased with.

So I want to exhort a little bit with this tremendous Bible message as a background or a foundation to stand on. And I read verses 1 through 5 of 1 Corinthians 2. And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellence of speech or of wisdom, declaring, not explaining, but declaring, not debating, but declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I have determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness and fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power. In order that your faith should not stand in the wisdom, the best or the poorest, any kind, in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

This is a day, perhaps signally a day, when our Lord Christ is challenged concerning his sovereignty and power. Three-fourths of this world has struck tense, and humanity is dead sure on the march today. And this lawless spirit of challenging this Christ of whom we heard from Brother Johnson is being felt and breaking out.

And you can't cover it up anymore in every realm of life, social. The bottoms fall out of all decency social-wise now. Political, religious.

This is the time if we shall speak to our day. If we shall not seek to prove doctrine for doctrine's sake. If our doctrine shall be borne out of the issues that are threatening to dethrone Christ in a given day.

If that bone of our bone and blood of our blood are not something to be argued or proved. This is the time to reaffirm and to proclaim the sole authority and the absolute sufficiency of the Son of God. I am not altogether happy that the most prophetic voices on the face of the earth today are coming from Catholic bishops and priests.

It seems that the only people professing the name of Christ that God's able to get in on a word in edgewise. If you think I'm crazy it's because you do not read what's being written today. If you think I'm crazy it's because you do not visit the hospitals in the back alleys of our cities while we are putting a little more pepper on our pet doctrines and see the priest and millionaire layman of Catholicism today putting the gospel into practice and meeting the questions that people are asking today.

Brothers on the mark. Bishop Sheen, you do well to listen to him sometimes. God sometimes speaks so that he can speak through Balaam's jackass while he might speak through a Catholic priest.

Bishop Sheen has made the prophetic statement that Antichrist is here. Some of us believe that Antichrist will be personified. But brother, his presence and power is dead sure arrived on the scene.

I want to exhort a little while this morning on a question that raises so many questions that I'll not have time to answer because I can't answer them. I speak as an evangelist. I recognize that a man's gift shall make room for him.

I recognize the tremendous need for all of the gifted ministers of the risen Lord. And so I'm not going to be able to answer much of what I suggest this morning. God help us.

I am so deathly afraid that we're fighting battles that have already been fought, that we're raising questions that nobody's interested in, that especially we of the grace persuasion, as was voiced in the preceding message, are terribly in danger of being cultists, meeting together to congratulate ourselves on how sound our doctrine is and how terrible the other fellows' is. A cult, you know. We meet on Sunday morning and congratulate ourselves on our marvelous belief.

I used to teach history, and I'm always interested in history. I have made it my business to try to find out if this statement I'm going to make is not so. It was suggested, of course, by Jonathan Edwards, under whom he got it from, that the task of every generation of God's people is to determine the direction in which the sovereign Redeemer is going in his day, not Calvin's day, not the day of the Puritans, but in his day, and then go in that direction.

I believe that every man and every movement that God has ever used is enabled to use it because he got them to focus their attention on those issues and relate their gospel and their doctrine to the enemies that were crossing the path of the gospel in their day. I think I've made every mistake that can be made doctrinally and methodically in trying to get to this foundation E.W. talked about. It hadn't been an easy battle.

I don't want to be asleep in this awful day. I want to be a witness. I want to challenge God's church to a twentieth-century witness empowered by the Holy Ghost to this Lord of Life.

And I believe that we must engage in bloody battle. Every enemy that is tearing down that foundation almost got torn down. Every enemy that crosses the path of the gospel in our day, not those enemies that were pertinent yesterday, but the ones today.

A preacher from San Antonio said in Miami the other day, and I got a little hope, he said it's a pastor's year, some fifteen thousand will go home quickly in mama's little army boy. And with the voice of the sundering prophet of God, call this generation of non-involved so-called Christians, get their hands dirty in the battle of this hour. Because I understand that in public gatherings such as this, we preach that we wouldn't have nerve enough to preach in our own churches.

That's true, God has left the convention. But I'd like to hear that. This preacher said that one of his big businessmen members came to him not long ago and said, Pastor, I'm so tired of being inspired.

I'd love to get my hands dirty in the war that's going on. How in the name of God could we get involved in this hour? I've already been to the kitchen and told two or three of the women that last year they had too much salt on the beans and that they had it this year. I'm going to start a protest, a picket line.

I'm going to get involved in something. I'm so tired. I'm going to protest something.

I read by the editor of one of the Southern Baptist state, Southern Baptist papers, writing in the paper, said the other day, that Southern Baptist preachers and churches were guilty of sleeping through the revolution of our hour. And they were refusing to get involved in the issues of this day because they were afraid it would hurt our cooperative program. But you say amen to that and we bow to this guilt.

Sleeping through a revolution. I say that we need to shift our stance to face the issues of this hour. In the 16th century, Martin Luther and Calvin and those men, in their beginnings, those beginnings were made within a corrective Christian society called Christendom.

And for more than a century, Protestants after Calvin and those men and the Puritans were forced to be on the defensive, preserving the purity of their faith and worship against relentless adversaries. Thus the Puritans and their predecessors focused attention on the word and what they called the sacrament. But you do not get the missionary note in the Puritans.

We honor them for their defense of the gospel. But today we are in a missionary situation. I don't care where you live, for there is no such thing as Christendom anymore.

There is no culture, there is no spot of earth anywhere that can be labeled as Christian, either corrupt or good. Everywhere in the world today, Christians find themselves in the middle of secular and pagan cultures. And Christians are called upon to rebel both in the schools and church and place of business with people who are utterly indifferent to or downright hostile to every claim of Jesus Christ.

Every ethic of Christianity is under fire now. And they're not using slingshots. This is the day of revival, the revival of every ism that has ever spewed out of hell.

Communism. Paganism. Hatred between the Arabs and the Jews and the Russians and the United States.

You could taste it and cut it with a knife in the last few days. Not a great section of the world's geographic territory has now been closed to the gospel of the Lord of Life. Every ism, institutionalism, nationalism,

materialism, every ism is on the march today.

There are no absolutes. No law that Johnson talked about. That's a wreck of an absent monarch that we could do without.

No Bible and no living Lord. And God kept us very little involved. Arthur Compton, the Nobel Prize winner in physics, has coined this phrase, Science has created a world in which Christianity is imperative.

Science has created a world in which Christianity is imperative. But a look at us in America would reveal that we are a very religious people, but that our religious life is largely a matter of gratification, seldom a sacrifice. Somebody said religion in America is an umbrella to protect us from the rain and that the safest place to hide from God now is within the membership of any of our churches.

People turn to religion today as a remedy for sleeplessness, for worry, for ineffectiveness, to be free from frustrations and tensions, to become resourceful and successful. And the presumption is that God exists to serve us, whereas our chief end in life is to serve him. And once we think of God as existing to serve us, our religion becomes very comforting and comfortable.

Passivity is the word that best describes us. It is amazing how well we think of ourselves because we've learned a little doctrine. Our cleverness is apparent in our apathy, our complacency.

You know, it takes a whole lot to rouse us, and then we're not roused for very long. We'd much rather meditate on the Psalms than get our hands dirty in the front trenches. Who'd ever charge this generation of Calvinists and anybody else of turning the world upside down? We are not noted for crusading or for performing zeal.

Bad men don't fear us, and evil can go on unchecked. We shoulder no cross, carry no banners, shun commitments and causes, conform to the world. Professor Mills of one of our universities makes this indicative statement, neither preachers nor laity matter.

What they do and what they say can be readily agreed to and safely ignored. I want you to indulge me as I read a parody that they use out in the First Presbyterian Church in San Rafael, California, a parody, this afternoon you read the 149th and 150th psalms, great psalms of psalms of praise. And this parody of these two psalms was put in the bulletin of this church and is to be chanted after the solemn reading of the budget.

And it speaks of our non-involvement. Here's how it reads, Oh, sing unto the Lord an old song, one that he hears over and over again, the song of the mighty with power and wealth, who live in fatness in the abundance of possessions, whose tents have thick carpets and hosts of electronic servants, and who say, behold, we cannot give more. We must feed our overfed children and buy overpowered cars and maintain our fantastic standards, though we don't care to reason why.

Oh, give praise unto a God who lets us get away with it, who answers our cries of empty self-pity, not with ponderings and likenings of a God of wrath, judging his own, who think they can live in a world of suffering and loneliness and lostness and hostility and horrible, devastating war and not care enough to love and give ourselves, who give thanks unto him whose only rebuke, oh, give thanks unto him whose only rebuke is the silence and our own conscience, great and mighty is our God and greatly to be praised, for he watches us decrease our giving, withdraw our involvement, lessen our pain, crawl into our beautiful stone shell through the wide, tearful eyes of a hundred thousand hungry children, through the narrow, hostile

faces of the craftsmen of international conspiracies, through the nodding sarcasm of disillusioned youths, and he says, our God says nothing. Praise ye the Lord, praise him upon the high sound and instruments, for even as we lust after the enchantments of much goods of possessions and pledge no excellence to our faith, even so does he permit us, but though he be silent, yet that he follow after us, and an old scene is repeated, there is a sound of nails in the flesh and a sigh in the dark, and grace, non-involvement, the apostle Paul goes to write a letter of correction, reestablishment, reaffirmation, where he labored in the city of Corinth, and he says three things that I mention very quickly. There's the little word, know, that I want to look at.

I determine not to know. There's the word, determine, and there's the word, demonstration. Voices come from every direction, and this preacher stands here.

I'm older, I guess, than any preacher here, and under God I don't know. There are so many voices today, but when you get a little older, and I'm not old yet, but I'm older than I used to be, time flies so fast, and if especially like myself, you wonder under God if there's ever been the least bit of fruit, and I'm not being pious now. I've seen so much of what I looked like was of God, and the devil tore it up in 15 minutes, so I just don't know.

Oh, God, to be shooting in the right direction today, I want that for myself, and for every young preacher that's had the guts to cross swords with the blasphemous stuff called the gospel that's got us in the mess we're in. And I have the word of criticism for young preachers. They make 10 million mistakes, but God bless your heart if they're heading in the right direction.

Amen. How would the Apostle Paul come to Iceland, Kentucky, or Birmingham, or wherever it is, and try to cross swords with those enemies that are eating at the very vitals of everything that's worthwhile in time and eternity, have almost wiped off the face of the earth an evangelical consciousness of sin, until nobody feels the need of being seized upon by a power greater than themselves that can do in them and fire them what they cannot do for themselves. And when all of us sometime want to throw up our hands and say, Let this old world go to hell, it does not take air.

It feels no need. How to get involved? I think, first of all, in the Word, No. Paul said, I just know one thing.

And that refers to his stance. Forty years ago, I read from G. Carmel Morgan a statement I've never got over. And he showed how even the emphasis in the days of Puritanism could have been improved upon.

And how every young preacher, listen to me now, better listen to me. We'd better take a man like Paul as a sample and a guide. And the Apostle Paul thought that the issues were so vital that to waste time on anything else than standing and proclaiming a little more.

Not starting with the virgin birth and working up to where when everybody's gone home we mention the resurrection. But the Apostle Paul started there and worked backwards. I get so sick of fundamentalism I want to vomit.

He's arguing about the virgin birth. The Apostle Paul never paid any attention to it. And he didn't have to.

Because if you believe in a living Lord, the rest of it's easy. And the rest of it's impossible. A man's a fool to believe a baby's born without a human father.

Well, none do anything except Jesus Christ, the person who is the same one who reigned and won the throne. He got there by way of a bloody cross. But no doctrine and no belief for the person who's the only answer for the condition in Corinth and the condition today.

Samuel Rutherford wrote a friend from prison and he said, Jesus Christ came into my cell last night and every stone fights like a ruby. He knew a living Lord. 62 years old.

This has become the quest of my soul. Oh my God to know a living Lord. He turned the prison to set our hearts on fire to love us and to be loved by us forever.

When the church quits debating it's doctrine of the resurrection, can we really believe and see an experience of risen living Lord? Maybe the fires and zeal come back. We can't do it to fuss with each other. We already know so much we're about to burst.

If we could believe in this Jesus Christ who came in a man's cell and the glory of God was there. So be it Lord. Thy throne shall never like earth's proud empires pass away.

Thy throne, thy kingdom stands and grows forever till all thy creatures on thy sway. If we could quit believing in the doctrine of the risen Lord, live in the glory of the Lord of the doctrine. Oh this is our only hope now I guess.

When I was a young preacher, like every young preacher, I thought I could make folks do things I found out I can't. Oh God help us. Who you know for all.

I know a living Christ. He's the one that is crucified. And the Greek I think stands there to say that there never was a time in the experience of God when there wasn't a cross and a man hanging on it and that that man is alive! Head over heels! To love us and wash our feet.

What we need my dear brethren all of our little improvements we don't need to improve but now we need revitalization. Paul said I'm not going to know anything except this person. And then that word determined I just mentioned it in the past the uniqueness.

He said this to me I have a settled conviction. And he was through with anything else. If we don't start here and camp here if we begin anywhere else no hope.

Nothing, nothing, nothing. I have determined I made up my mind I've thought about this business to present this one without any addition or subtraction without any substitutes I've determined to present God's answer for time and eternity. Listen through Lord.

What you're doing around here I said Pilate John 18 2 This end was I born. Therefore Peter will say let all the house of Israel know as a matter of fact that this same Jesus whom you have God hath made both Lord and Messiah. That's the profoundest statement I ever read in my life.

When I started to preach I could preach all of us in the Bible 15 minutes and a half, 10 minutes just to wander. Now under God this profound truth as I get older hits me that we've already heard this morning. This is it! This must be the determined presentation of God for us through men.

God demands that men not admire but absolutely surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. My time's up. And I mention the word demonstration.

This is not piosity. This is not fatalism. This is not laziness.

This is the desperate need of my heart in Europe that we shall become desperate about the fact that only the Holy Ghost can save us.

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