

March 2, 2025 by Steve Brandon



The Conflict between Truth and Lies

John 8:31-59

- 1. Truth Brings Freedom (verses 31-38)**
- 2. Truth Shows Faith (verses 39-47)**
- 3. Truth Gives Life (verses 48-59)**

One of the biggest political stories in our nation came from a meeting that took place at the White House this week. Volodymyr Zelensky came from Ukraine to discuss a potential agreement with Donald Trump and the United States regarding the war in Ukraine with Russia. Typically, when world leader visits from other nations, there is a time of welcoming in the Oval Office in front of the press core. Some pleasantries are exchanged from both sides, with some expectations being set for the visit. The press are then dismissed and the real discussions take place behind closed doors. At the end of the day, there is typically a press conference to discuss the agreements that took place during the day.

Over the past month, this pattern has emerged with six national leaders visiting the white house. Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister of Israel, visited on February 3, 2025. Shigeru Ishiba, Prime Minister of Japan ,visited on February 7, 2025. Abdulla II bin al-Hussein, King of Jordan, visited on February 11, 2025. Naredra Modi, Prime Minister of India, visited on February 13, 2025. Emmanuel Macron, President of France, visited on February 24, 2025. Keir Starmer, Prime Minister of England, visited on February 27, 2025.^[1] The meeting was in the Oval Office and followed by a closed-doors meeting, which was followed by a public press conference. The same was scheduled to happen this past Friday (February 28, 2025) with Volodymyr Zelenskyy, President of Ukraine, but the news story was what happened during the introduction in the Oval Office.

An argument broke out between Zelenskyy and Trump and Vice President, J. D. Vance. It turned ugly. Zelenskyy and Trump were going back and forth with angry comments and accusations. For all involved it was very uncomfortable. One member of the press said that we have never seen anything like this before. The issues are complex, and people are lining up on either side of the argument. I'm not here to make a political statement, but I want for you to see how unusual it was that a foreign head of state would come into the Oval Office and take strong issue with those in American leadership, with the press (and the world watching). After the press left, and a little bit of talk, Zelenskyy and his team were kicked out of the White House, and told to go home without a deal. They did not even have time to eat the lunch that was prepared. That lunch was served to the White House Staffers.

I bring up this argument, because, this is much like the argument that we are considering today in our text, John, chapter 8, where a full-scale argument ensued.

When you consider the context of the argument between Trump and Zelenskyy, you can understand what a brazen thing it was for Zelenskyy to engage in the argument. Most foreign leaders in the Oval Office simply smile when things aren't going their way, hoping to set things straight behind closed doors. After all, you are at the place of power in the United States. It is not proper to make a scene in that place with everyone watching, especially if you are in a state of weakness (as Zelenskyy is).

I want for you to think about Jesus. He was definitely not the one in power. He had but a few followers at this point. He came to Jerusalem, to the very heart of the temple, to the seat of power in Jerusalem which is not unlike our Oval Office. He went toe-to-toe with the Pharisees, the very ones in power in Jerusalem. He said some very hard things, at the feast, in public for all to hear. Jesus called these Pharisees in power, liars (John 8:55). Jesus told these religious experts that that they didn't know God (John 8:55). Jesus told them that they were sons of the devil (John 8:44). Jesus told them that they would die in their sins (John 8:24).

Too often we become so familiar with the words of the Bible that we miss the real drama of what actually happened. As uncomfortable as many were over the public argument that Trump and Zelenskyy had, I'm sure that the same was felt by many during the argument that ensued between Jesus and the religious authorities as recorded in John, chapter 8.

My message this morning is entitled, "The Conflict between Truth and Lies." Jesus is putting forth the truth, and the Pharisees are constantly spouting forth lies. In fact, you can argue that everything that the Pharisees say in this passage is a lie. Every single time they speak, they speak lies. The only parts of their responses that are tricky is when they ask a question. When they assume an answer, they are always assuming the wrong things.

So, let's begin reading our text in verse 31.

John 8:31

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

Here's my first point:

- 1. Truth Brings Freedom (verses 31-38)**

This is what Jesus says in verse 32,

John 8:32

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

This is the reality of Jesus. He brings freedom. This is contrary to the belief of many non-Christians. Many think that Jesus brings you into bondage because of all of the things that he requires of us. Indeed, Jesus does require much of us: to follow Jesus requires our all. This is what he is getting at in verse 31. Speaking to those who had believed in him, Jesus was seeking to be very clear.

John 8:31

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,

This is a carryover from verse 30, where we read that "many believed in him." Jesus is making clear what belief in him requires. It requires abiding in his word, believing his word, trusting his word, and obeying his word. Many find this difficult because they don't want to do the things that Jesus directs them to do. They want to do their own things. But what many non-Christians don't realize, is that Jesus brings freedom in these things. Sure, Jesus requires much of us, but he also gives us joy in following in his ways. This joy is the difference between freedom and bondage. But these Jews didn't understand that. Look at verse 33, where we get our first statement in our passage from the Pharisees, and where we get our first lie.

John 8:33

They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?"

I trust you see how erroneous this is. First of all, let's have a little history lesson. God called Abraham around 2,000 B.C. He promised to give him and his offspring the land of Canaan. But when his descendants were 70 in number, they were exiled to Egypt, where they became enslaved to the Egyptians. It took the mighty hand of the Lord working through Moses to deliver them from slavery. Really? The Jews had never been enslaved by anyone?

Second, at that moment, the Jews were under the control of the Romans. This was clear right there where they were on the temple grounds, if they would but look up. Overseeing the entire temple mount was the Antonia Fortress. It housed the Roman Army, who watched over all of the activities on the temple grounds. Would there be any disturbance on the grounds, the Roman soldiers were ready to respond with military force at a moment's notice. (In Acts 21:31-32, we saw their quick response, when a mob formed against the apostle Paul, seeking to kill him. The Romans got wind of it, and quickly dispatched soldiers and centurions to keep the peace with their military might and the soldiers stopped the Jews from beating Paul). These Jews were essentially slaves to the Romans. They hated the bondage. They wanted to be set free from the Romans (Luke 24:21). Yet, they utter the lie,

John 8:33

We have never been enslaved to anyone.

Jesus responds to their lie by talking about their slavery to sin. Look at verse 34.

John 8:34-36

Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. a slave to sin. what a picture! being slaves to your own body.

I trust that you all know a thing or two about this. You see some ice cream that your body wants, and you eat the ice cream against all reason, because it tastes good. You have no will-power to resist. You see that image on the screen, and rather than turning away, you gaze upon the image, because you have no power to resist. Your co-worker insults you, and rather than turning a deaf ear, you snap back in rage, because you have no power to keep your mouth shut. Your life's circumstances turn sour, and rather than trusting God through the pain, you lash out in grumbling against God, because you can't control your attitude. These are the sorts of things that enslave us in our sinful bodies. But the promise that Jesus gives is freedom through the Son!

John 8:36

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

This, dear friends, is the hope of the gospel! That belief in Jesus gives freedom to our souls. The apostle Paul picks up this same imagery in Romans, chapter 6 and 7. He talks about sin reigning in our bodies. But he speaks about the power of Christ to free us from our sin.

Listen to Romans 6:16-18.

Romans 6:16-18

Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness.

This comes through faith in Jesus! Do you want to be free from the slavery of sin? Then turn to Jesus! Trust in him! The truth is that true freedom can only be found in him. This is our first point, 1. Truth Brings Freedom (verses 31-36) Our second point is:

2. Truth Shows Faith (verses 39-47)

Returning to our conflict in John 8, in verse 37, Jesus points out the sin of these Jews. He returns to their first statement in verse 33, where they said, "We are offspring of Abraham."

John 8:37

I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you.

Jesus is pointing out the obvious! It is incongruent for the offspring of Abraham to seek to kill one who came from God! Yet they were. Jesus explains why in verse 38.

John 8:38

I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.

It comes down to paternity. Jesus says, "I follow after my Father. You follow after your father." We will see in a bit what Jesus is getting at here. I don't want to spoil the surprise. Look at how they respond.

John 8:39

They answered him, "Abraham is our father."

I told you before that everything that the Jews said in these verses is a lie. It seems here as if here in verse 39, they are speaking truthfully. Indeed, to be a Jew, by definition, is to be one of Abraham's offspring. Jesus affirmed that they were Abraham's offspring (in verse 37),

John 8:37

"I know that you are offspring of Abraham."

Yet, Jesus will show them how Abraham may be their physical father, but they are not his spiritual children. Thus, their lie. Look again at verse 39.

John 8:39-41

They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did."

Abraham was a man of faith. Abraham was a man who followed the LORD. He didn't seek to kill the one who was telling the truth. The conclusion here that Jesus draws is simple: "You are not a spiritual child of Abraham." This comes to all of us. How do you know who a child of God is? look at the way that he acts. If you follow after the ways of God, you are a child of God. If you follow not after the ways of God, you are not a child of God.

This is what John will write later in his epistle.

1 John 2:3-6

And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him: whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

When it comes to faith in Jesus, it's not a matter of what you say. it's what you do. Now, don't get me wrong, coming to God is not a matter of works. You come to God by faith alone. But true faith is never alone. It will show itself in the way that one lives. So, if you are here this morning and claiming to be a follower of Jesus, and yet, not following in his ways, you are no better off than these Jews, who claimed that they were children of Abraham. You are no better off than they.

Jesus said that they were not doing the works of God, and they were offended by what Jesus said. Look at their response in verse 41.

John 8:41

They said to him, "We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God."

With these words, these Jews were referring back to the birth of Jesus. It was a great scandal in his day. Mary had a baby before she was married. Again, we can be so used to the virgin birth of Jesus, that we forget the reality of what took place in those days. We see the righteousness of Mary and Joseph. We see how they were blameless before God. because, we know the inside story of the angel's visit to Mary and the miraculous birth that took place according to the prophesy of Isaiah 7:14, which says "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel."

But there were many who didn't have the inside story, who didn't believe Joseph and Mary. Many who thought that Jesus was an illegitimate child. That's what the Jews here were insinuating:

John 8:41

We were not born of sexual immorality [Like you were].

Again, it's a lie. Jesus was not born of sexual immorality. Jesus was born by the Holy Spirit. The very fact that these Jews brought this up, something that happened some 30 years prior, demonstrates the hostility that they had for Jesus, trying to discredit him in every way. Jesus is in the wrong. The Jews were in the right.

John 8:41

They said to him, "We have one Father—even God."

This also was a lie, which Jesus exposed, beginning in verse 42.

John 8:42

Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.

Again, Jesus is revealing his identity, as the Son of God, sent from God. He brings out the truth, that if God were really your Father, then you would believe in Jesus, that he came from God. But they didn't believe the truth. Jesus continued on with some of the strongest words yet.

John 8:43-44

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

What strong words! We may have thought that the argument in the Oval Office had some strong words between Trump and Zelenskyy, but the words of Jesus are far stronger than anything that Trump and Zelenskyy said to each other! Jesus here tells these Jews that their father is the devil. That he is a liar, and that he has not truth in him. As sons of their father, Jesus says, that their will "is to do [their] father's desire." They do as their father does. The devil lies, and these Jews are liars, and these Jews do not have the truth in them.

Again, I think that reflecting upon the White House this week is helpful to us because Jesus went into the house of power (the temple) and blasted those in authority! Zelenskyy came in to the Oval Office and blasted Trump and Vance! He said, "You cannot negotiate with Putin. He has broken deals in the past. He will break deals in the future." Many in America could not believe what took place. It was so out of the regular decorum of other state leaders to behave this way. So also with Jesus. Jesus comes into the heart of the temple, and blasts the authorities, calling them sons of the devil! These were the religious experts of the day! These were the ones who held all of the cards and Jesus spoke strongly and clearly against them. He cut it straight with them. Then, the clarity comes in verse 45.

John 8:45

But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me.

Catch the logic here. They were so against the truth that they didn't believe. That's my point: 2. Truth Shows Faith (verses 37-47). When the truth comes, it will either be believed or rejected. Accepting the truth will bring faith. Rejecting the truth will expose the lack of faith. This is what Jesus says in verse 46,

John 8:46-47

Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.

Jesus is drawing a clear line in the sand. They don't believe the truth that Jesus speaks, because they are not of God. Again, listen closely to the words of Jesus. Just because some religious leader claims that he is of God, doesn't make it so. These Jews were the ones who spoke for God, and yet, Jesus, says, "you are not of God." Just because someone you know claims that he (or she) is of God, and just because someone claims to speak for God, doesn't make it so. Just because you claim to be of God, doesn't make it so. What makes it so is if you hear the words of God, and believe the words of God, and your life demonstrates that you believe the words of God, That's what makes it so.

OK, Let's move on to my last point this morning. We have seen how 1. Truth Brings Freedom (verses 31-38) We have seen how 2. Truth Shows Faith (verses 39-47), and now, we see how

3. Truth Gives Life (verses 48-59)

John 8:48

The Jews answered him, "Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?"

These insults came out of left field. It's like these Jews were out of insults, so they went to the most extreme that they could. Nothing could be further from the truth. They had their reasons. They were suspicious about the circumstances surrounding the virgin birth of Jesus. Without faith, it's easy to believe that Mary hooked up with some Samaritan man, and that from that union Jesus came forth into this world. But this wasn't true. Jesus was a miracle child, conceived by the Holy Spirit, not some Samaritan man.

Furthermore, Jesus didn't have a demon. His grace and kindness demonstrated this. Those with demons were out of control. But Jesus was very under control. The Jews hated him for it.

Jesus sets it all straight in verse 49,

John 8:49

Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me.

What a great summary of the situation. It set the two sides Jesus was honoring his Father in heaven. But these Jews were dishonoring Jesus. In dishonoring Jesus, they were going against the will of God.

John 8:50

Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge.

You know this about Jesus. When he walked the earth, he wasn't seeking glory for himself. He was humbly helping those who were sick. He wasn't making large displays of his righteousness for all to see, as these Pharisees were doing. But God was seeking the glory of Jesus. Then Jesus said, in verse 51,

John 8:51

Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death."

This is where I get my point: "Truth Gives Life." If you believe the truth, and if you keep the truth, then you will never see death. This is core of the gospel, that if you believe in Jesus, and your belief is shown in your life, then you will have eternal life. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

This is the reason why John wrote his gospel. John, himself tells us that "Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30-31). In other words, John could have written many things, but these truths are written that you might believe! that you might have life.

This is my point: "Truth Gives Life." Now, again, the Jews didn't understand what Jesus was saying.

John 8:52

The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a demon! Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, 'If anyone keeps my word, he will never taste death.'

Again, here are the lies! Jesus didn't have a demon! Then come questions, that are expecting some negative answers:

John 8:53

Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died!

The first question was, "Are you greater than our father Abraham?" The expected answer is, "No." The second question was, "[Are you greater than] the prophets [who] died!" Again, "No" was the expected answer. Then comes their assertion: "You are not greater than the prophets [who] died." Then comes the crux of the matter:

John 8:53

"Who do you make yourself out to be?"

Jesus will answer that question, but he begins with some affirmations of the truth:

John 8:54-55

Jesus answered, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, 'He is our God.' But you have not known him. I know him. If I were to say that I do not know him, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and I keep his word.

The argument hasn't dissipated. It has only heated up! You say, "He is our God," but he is not. You all are liars! I know God and have kept his word. Then comes the truth about Abraham:

John 8:56

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad."

This totally threw the Jews. Here is a reference to Abraham being alive and well, even beyond the tomb, after death.

John 8:57-58

So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

This is the whole argument of John. Throughout the book of John, we have seen Jesus use the phrase, "I am." There are times when this is merely an image or metaphor to explain what he came to do. Sometimes they are more subtle, referring to his person, that he is indeed the "I am" of Exodus 3:14, Yahweh God in the flesh.

This response of Jesus really goes back to verse 53, when they asked Jesus, "Who do you make yourself out to be?" Jesus said, "I am." These Jews were originally disposed against Jesus. And now he is calling himself to be God! That's blasphemy! That deserves death!

John 8:59

So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Somehow Jesus was able to escape the attempt to kill him. I believe that there was some divine protection here. Throughout the gospel of John, we get the sense of his hour coming when he would die. But here, it is not yet his hour, so God has his protecting hand upon him.

But I ask you, are you disposed to the truth? Or, are you contrary to the truth?

When I was in seminary, I was learning Greek. This was some 35 years ago. I had some Jehovah's Witnesses come to my door. It was a great opportunity for me to test my theology. I'm guessing that they visited my door some 8-9 times. In the warm Los Angeles weather, we were able to talk outside there on the front porch of the house a handful of us guys were renting.

At one point, the discussion turned to talking about our passage this morning. So, I took my Greek New Testament and turned to John 8. At that time, I didn't know how their Watchtower text (The New World Translation) translates this passage. So, I was listening to them read this passage and I was following along in the Greek. Then, they came to John 8:58, which is translated (in their text), "Most truly I say to you, before Abraham came into existence, I have been."

I could barely believe what I heard, because the Greek text is as clear as can be. It says that before Abraham was, "I am." With the emphasis upon the "I am's" of John, it couldn't be clearer that it should be translated in a similar way. Yet, here was their New World Translation saying, "I have been." There is no way that "I am" means "I have been." Throughout all of John, I'm sure that their translation translates these same words, "I am." These words are a clear reference to the deity of Jesus.

So, why does the New World Translation translate this, "I have been" rather than "I am"? Because they are disposed against the truth that Jesus is Jehovah God. So that when the truth comes, they will change it and distort it to believe a lie. There is clear antagonism to the truth. But this is the very truth that gives life! That Jesus is the "I am!" He is the living one! Jesus is the very essence of life! He is the one who gives life. And the Jehovah's witnesses flat out deny this reality because they don't embrace the truth about Jesus.

This is exactly what the Jews did with Jesus. They were so opposed to the reality of him being God, that they picked up stones to stone him!

Well, this passage is all about truth. It's about how truth gives freedom. It's about how truth demonstrates faith, whether or not you will accept what is true. It's about how truth is the very thing that gives life. My hope for all of us is that we believe and embrace the truth as it is in Scripture, as it is in Jesus. My hope is that we would experience the life that he gives, in contrast to these Jews who lived with antagonism to the truth about Jesus.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 2, 2025 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rockvalleybiblechurch.org.

[1] See <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/articles/foreign-leaders-who-have-visited-trump-at-the-white-house>.