

Truth and Lies

These Things are Written that You May Believe Series

John 8:31-59

Pastor Bryan Clark

Well, it's been an interesting couple of weeks. Who would have imagined a month or two ago that the whole world would kind of come to a standstill because of a virus? You know, about the time we think we're running the show, God reminds us we're not in control nearly as much as we think we are. As I've talked to people this week, it seems like one of the most common conversations is people are trying to figure out where the truth lies. There's a lot of information; there's a lot of misinformation. There's even disagreement among the experts, and everybody's trying to figure out, "What's the truth and what's the level of media hype that's created a lot of fear and hysteria?" We probably all have opinions about that, but we aren't experts; we don't know. So we're trying to be good, responsible members of our community and do what we're told, and we'll work our way through this. But it does remind me of a lot of conversations I've had again and again with people through the years as it relates to religion. It's a very similar dynamic, as people are frustrated, trying to figure out what's true. They have this longing for a relationship with God. They feel something deep in their souls; they're trying to figure it out, but it's so confusing. There are so many different religions, so many different truth claims, and it kind of has that same feel to it as people are frustrated, trying to figure out what's actually true. I understand that it is really confusing, but it's really helpful to understand that according to Jesus, the confusion related to religion is intentional. It's intentional by the devil, to keep us from Jesus and a relationship with God. That's what we want to talk about today.

If you have a Bible, turn with us to the Gospel of John, Chapter 8. If you're new with us, we're working our way through the Gospel of John. We're about halfway through chapter 8. Jesus is in Jerusalem. It's about six months before His arrest and crucifixion. There's a lot of tension. The religious leaders want to arrest Him and put Him to death. There are others who are starting to believe. This is in the middle of a rather long discourse. Jesus is in the courtyard of the temple. He's talking to a large crowd of people and it ranges from those who believe to those who want to put Him to death, and everything in between. So there's a lot in this, and I'm not going to try to deal with every single word and phrase, but stay focused on the main message here. So we pick it up in verse 31:

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (*NASB, John 8:31-32)

So Jesus is talking to those who believe, but we've seen this a couple of times in John's Gospel. There are those who believe in Jesus, but He doesn't yet believe in them. They believe He can do miracles. They believe He's some sort of a prophet. They're kind of enjoying the show, but they don't really yet understand that this is God in the flesh, and that they have a sin problem, and He has come to be the Savior of the world. So what He's saying to His disciples is, "If you're really disciples, keep following Me; keep listening to Me; keep understanding what I'm saying, and you'll understand the truth, and **it's the truth that will make you free.** Now think about this. These people were in a very religious culture. It was as religious in first century Jerusalem as it was anywhere in the world, and so they had

the same confusion about Jesus. Again Jesus is basically saying, “Listen to Me and follow Me and I’ll tell you the truth, and it’s the truth that will set you free. Verse 33:

They answered Him, “We are Abraham’s descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, ‘You will become free?’”

It’s a really interesting response. The nation of Israel has spent a good portion of their existence enslaved to someone, so it’s a rather odd thing for them to say. They were enslaved in Egypt. They were enslaved at times to the Philistines. They were enslaved to the Babylonians, to the Assyrians, to Greece and now, during the first century, they were enslaved to Rome. So it’s like, “What are they talking about?” But identifying themselves as *descendants of Abraham*, essentially what they’re saying is, “Even though we’re governed by these nations over us, because we’re God’s people, we’re still free!” It’s kind of like a child whose parent forces them to sit down, and they’re saying, “I may be sitting on the outside but I’m still standing on the inside.” So it’s this idea that because we’re descendants of Abraham, we’re still free. But the problem was they weren’t free! They were in incredible religious bondage. They were overwhelmed and burdened by the Law. They were suffocated by the Law. Many of the first-century Jews had concluded they could never be acceptable to God and had given up, and even Jesus Himself identified the overwhelming burden and suffocation of the Law on these people. So this illusion that because they’re descendants of Abraham, they’re actually still free, certainly wasn’t true.

But just imagine Jesus making this same statement to twenty-first-century Americans. Because we think we’re so free, we think we have it figured out. We think, “You know, we’re gonna run our own lives.” We’re all kinds of these individuals, so, “I’ll decide what’s right and wrong and I’ll decide what’s true, and nobody’s gonna tell me what to do!” So it’s kind of this rugged individualism that defines Americans. “It’s the land of the free; don’t tell me what to do.” But the reality is we’re not free. As a matter of fact, every study out there reveals the same thing. We’re more depressed; we’re more anxious; we’re more fearful, we’re more medicated. We’re more addicted than any generation before us. It’s like, “We’re not free. We’re enslaved!” The problem with both the first-century Jews and the problem with people today is we’ve failed to understand the core issue. Verse 34:

Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.”

Jesus was identifying that the core issue is sin. We are enslaved to sin, and no amount of religion can set people free from the enslavement of sin. Verse 35:

“The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.” (Vs. 35-36)

Jesus is using an analogy that’s kind of confusing to us. But about a third of the Roman Empire in the first century was made up of slaves, so something they were very familiar with. The idea was a slave had no real rights and privileges. So a slave might be in the house today, but sold tomorrow, and goes down the road to the next owner. But it was very different from the son. A son was part of the family, and so the son would be part of the family forever. So what Jesus is saying is that he is not just *a son*; He is *the Son* of God, and He will be the Son of God forever. **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.** The basic idea is that at the end of the story, the Son of God is the ultimate judge, and if the ultimate judge is the One that says, “You have been set free from your sin, then you are

free indeed, and free forever! So Jesus is identifying that the core problem is sin, and no amount of religious activity makes the sin go away. The only hope is through the Son, and if the Son says you're free, then it doesn't matter what any other religion says—you are free indeed! Verse 37:

I know that you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you have heard from *your* father. (Vs. 37-38)

So Jesus is beginning to get into the core of the argument. They claim to be *descendants of Abraham* and yet they do not hear or understand what Jesus is saying. They want to kill Him. Jesus is there, sent from the Father, so basically what Jesus has said all along is that He is the eternal Son of God, who has taken on human flesh, to enter into a world of religion and explain to these people, “This is the way of salvation. If the Son sets you free, you're free forever,” but they won't listen. Their religion has become a barrier to listening to and understanding the message of Jesus. The problem is who their father is. So this, at this point, is kind of confusing, but Jesus will sort it out here quick enough.

They answered and said to Him, “Abraham is our father.” Jesus said to them, “If you are Abraham's children, then do the deeds of Abraham. But as it is, you are seeking to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. You are doing the deeds of your father.” They said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father: God.” (Vs. 39-41)

So they answer and say, “**Abraham is our father,**” and Jesus says, “**If Abraham is your father, then act like Abraham.**” God spoke to Abraham, and Abraham understood and believed. Genesis 15:6: “Abraham believed, and was counted as righteous.” So going back to the story of Abraham before Moses, before the Law, before the Ten Commandments, before the Temple, before all this religious stuff, Abraham believed, and that's the message of the Gospel of John. “*These things are written that you may believe.*” So Jesus is saying, “If you were children of Abraham, you'd believe! But rather, you're trying to kill Me for telling you the truth about what God has to say about how you can deal with your sin problem.” He tells them, “Abraham didn't do that. You're not like Abraham at all,” to which they respond, “*Hey, at least we're not children of fornication.*” So what does that mean?

It's like in modern times: if you can't win the argument, then take a cheap shot at somebody's character. So basically there would have always been some story about Jesus' birth because Jesus was born of Mary, who was made pregnant through the Holy Spirit. There was always going to be some story about Mary getting pregnant during the betrothal, like an engagement period, and who exactly was Jesus' father? That's what they're implying. “You know, hey, at least we know who our father is because we weren't born of fornication.” Of course, Jesus doesn't play into that. Verse 42:

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. (Vs. 42-43)

Jesus is saying, “You're saying you're highly religious people, that you are from God, that you know God. But if you knew God, you would love Me, because I'm from God. I'm here to tell you the truth.

I'm here on a mission that has been initiated by the Father, so you would know what's true. But you're determined not to listen, and not to believe.” The core problem is identified then in verse 44:

“You are of *your* father, the devil,

(Now stop and think about this. Can you imagine gathering some of the most well-known, highly religious people of your day, who are supposedly representing God, and Jesus says to them, “Here's your problem. Your problem is your father, and your father is the devil!”? This is a dramatic moment in the story.)

...and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

So He has hinted a couple times the problem is your father, and now it's not a hint; it's pretty direct. “*Your father is the devil, and the devil is a liar.*” So He identifies the devil as a **murderer**. These are the people that want to kill Jesus, and what Jesus is saying is the reason you're acting like that is because of who your father is. Your father is a murderer, and it specifically says, “*all the way back to the beginning.*” So what He's referring to is all the way back to Genesis chapter 3, the beginning of the story. Adam and Eve were in paradise. Everything was wonderful. They were in a relationship with God, and then along comes the serpent who essentially was the devil, and the devil's a liar. So the first lie was that God is not as good as you think He is. “As good as this garden seems, “He's not nearly as good as you think He is. As a matter of fact, life could be better, and the way of life would be better for you if you were in charge—you to be God—and run your own life! Certainly that would be better.” So matter of fact, the liar said that you can be like God, deciding for yourself what's good and evil, what's right and wrong. Eve responds and says, “You know, if we do what God says, we'll die, and the serpent says, “You won't die. God's just trying to scare you.” So Adam and Eve fell for the temptation. They believed the lie and in that moment they died. They died spiritually.

There's a physical death and there's a spiritual death. When people think of death, they typically think of physical death. But the spiritual death is the greater death because it lasts forever. So in a sense, every moment of life I have is one moment closer to death, and ultimately physical death is a shadow or a reminder of a greater spiritual death, which is the death that lasts forever. So spiritual death is this separation from God. The devil is a murderer. He's been a murderer from the beginning; he's a liar. When he opens his mouth, out come lies. Jesus, on the other hand, not only tells the truth, He is the truth! Satan not only tells lies; he is a liar. That's his nature. That's his native language. So when he speaks, he lies and creates all this chaos in the world.

Going back to verse 44, it's very interesting. Jesus says, “**Whenever he speaks**, (the New American Standard says) **he speaks a lie**. Most translations have that footnoted. The actual Greek there is not “a lie”. It's “the lie”. The original Greek has the definite article: whenever he speaks “the lie”, which I think is the much better translation. It's saying “the lie” that fuels all other lies and deception. It's this lie that, “You can be God, and life would be better with you in charge. You can be your own God; you can run your own show,” and that's referred to as “the lie”.

Now think about this. Jesus is talking to highly religious people. Some of these are the Scribes and the Pharisees, the most religious, the most zealous for the Law people of the day. He's already told them that your big problem is your father, and your father is the devil and the devil is a liar. So what is religion? Religion is a man-made system that convinces men and women that you can make yourself acceptable to God. In other words, you can do this yourself. You can be your own God. The

logical question is, “If religion could make people right before God, why did Jesus need to come? Why did Jesus need to die on the cross?” Religion does not lead people to God; it actually becomes the barrier that prevents people from getting to God. As long as you believe that through religious works, religious rituals, religious activity, you can make yourself right before God, there is no need for Jesus. There's no need for a Savior. So Jesus is identifying that is the big lie that causes all this religious confusion that is preventing people from hearing and understanding what Jesus is saying.

The apostle Paul agrees with this in II Corinthians chapter 11. He talks about Satan, or the devil, disguises himself as an angel of light. If you go back and look at the context of that passage, it's talking about religion. It's talking about Judaism. He disguises himself as an angel of light means it's a lie. It's a lie to convince you that this is the way to God, that this is the path, the way to experience some sort of relationship with God. But religious works, religious activity, cannot make your sin go away. The issue is we have a sin problem, and no amount of religious activity makes the sin go away. If it's a lie, it's the lie that creates all this confusion. So it's really helpful to understand the reason there's all this religious confusion in the world, is that people are genuinely seeking after God, but their sin separates them from God. There's something deep in their soul that says, “But I, I want to know God; I want to seek after Him.” There's something that compels them to deal, in some way, with their shame and their guilt, so their logical conclusion would be, “Certainly that's found in religion.” But it just deceives and confuses them. It taps into this, “I can do this. Through enough religion, through enough ritual, through enough works, I can make myself acceptable to God.” And so it creates all this confusion that doesn't lead people to God. It actually creates this barrier where people don't hear what Jesus is saying. So here is God in the flesh, literally standing right in front of them, talking directly to them, trying to get them to listen, and they will not listen because they are so entrenched in the religious system. Verse 45: Jesus says,

“But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear *them*, because you are not of God.” (Vs. 45-47)

Again, I can't emphasize this enough. People think that religion gets them to God. These are highly religious Jews, and what Jesus just said is, “You don't know Me because you don't know God. If you knew God, you would listen to what I have to say.” Verse 48:

The Jews answered and said to Him, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father and you dishonor Me. But I do not seek My glory; there is One who seeks and judges. Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death.” (Vs. 48-51)

So the idea of a **Samaritan**, we'd probably use the word *heretic*. The Samaritans held kind of a loose version of the Law and were considered heretics. The idea of having a **demon**, we'd probably use the word *crazy*. “You're a heretic and you're crazy,” and they indicate they've been saying this over and over again. Jesus says He doesn't have a demon, but rather He's from the Father. He doesn't seek His own glory, but the Father has sent Him, and the Father glorifies the Son, and the Father has made Jesus the judge. So again, stop and think of what Jesus said. “*When the Son sets you free, you're free indeed*, because at the end of the story, it's the Son who judges and, if you listen and believe what the Son says, that's where you find the truth that sets you free.” At the end of verse 51 Jesus says, “**If anyone keeps my word, (in other words listens and believes) he will never see death.**”

So, it's a very interesting statement there. Jesus is saying that the ultimate death is spiritual death—this separation from God. That's the whole reason Jesus came. What separates us from God is our sin. Jesus came to deal with the sin problem, in order that we might experience forgiveness and be reconciled to God. What religion could never do for us, Jesus came and did for us. So even though we experience physical death, that is merely the transition into the presence of Jesus, and the promise to be delivered into the new heaven and the new earth, which is the world our souls long for. When Jesus was talking to his friends in John chapter 11, He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies." It's important to understand that ultimately, life is not found here on this earth. This is a struggle; this is a battle; this world breaks our heart again and again and again. Deep in our souls we long for something different. There's something within us that says, "I just feel like I was made for something more." The truth is you *were* created for something more, and God is so committed to that vision He actually took on human flesh and came to earth in order to make it possible. Jesus speaks the truth and it's the truth that sets us free. It's the forgiveness of sin, the release from the enslavement of sin, and the promise that even if we die, we will live.

It seems to me in times like this, that's a really important thing to understand. "Am I gonna get the virus?" "I don't know...maybe." "Could I die from it?" "I don't know...maybe." "Am I fearful of that?" "Absolutely not!" "Am I at peace?" "Absolutely yes!" because whether you live to be thirty, fifty, seventy, or ninety, nobody gets out of this story alive. We're all going to die of something. But once you understand that death is no longer the victor, and that Jesus on the basis of His death, burial, and resurrection has conquered sin and death once and for all, and because of that, even if I die, I will live, there's no reason to be afraid of death. There's no reason to live in fear. There isn't much in this world we can control, but we have every reason to be at peace. God's got this and He's offered Jesus as Savior, as a gift, if we're simply willing to receive. That's what Jesus means when He says we'll never see death. Verse 52:

The Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon. (We know You're crazy.) Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word, he will never taste of death.' Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? the prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?" (Vs. 52-53)

We would say, "Who do you think you are? Abraham died; the prophets died; who do you think you are?" What Jesus answers is He does indeed think He's greater than Abraham. He's God in the flesh.

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'; and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I will be a liar like you, but I do know Him and keep His word. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad." (Vs. 54-56)

So Jesus, again, is repeating a message we've seen a lot in John's Gospel—that God the Father sent God the Son on a mission to tell people the truth, and to be the Savior of the world—to do for people on the cross what religion could never do for people. What Jesus says is, "You don't get this because you don't know Him, but I do know Him, and He sent Me, and this is the truth. Verse 56, the comment related to Abraham, is really an interesting comment. Abraham believed. Paul uses this in Romans chapter 4 as an argument for justification or salvation by faith. With Abraham it wasn't religion, wasn't the Law, wasn't the temple. It wasn't a bunch of religious activity. God made a promise and Abraham believed. And the text says, "God credited that belief to Abraham as righteousness," meaning he could

stand right before God forever. It's hard to figure out exactly what Abraham believed, but he did believe that God made a promise. He did believe it would come through his seed. He did have some understanding that God somehow would shed His blood because of Abraham's inability to keep the covenant. And maybe part of this even goes to Genesis 22, when Abraham was going to offer Isaac, his son, as a sacrifice, and God stopped him, and provided a ram instead. Abraham understood that God would provide One who would be the substitute, who would die in our place. He understood that one day the Lamb of God would come to shed His blood to pay for the sins of the world. Abraham celebrated that promise. That's what Jesus just said. They keep saying, "We're of Abraham," and what Jesus keeps saying is, "You're not. If you were, you'd listen to Me; if you were you'd understand this. You need to realize Abraham saw some sort of a foreshadowing of this, and he celebrated what they are determined to stop," to which they reply:

So the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and You have seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am." Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple. (Vs. 57-59)

So they're again misunderstanding what Jesus is saying. "You're not even fifty years old. How could you be old enough to have known Abraham?" That's essentially what they're saying. But Jesus identifies that before Abraham existed, He existed. The "**I am**," is a very unique phrase. So when you read through John's Gospel, and Jesus says, "I am the Bread; I am the Water; I am the Light," that's a different Greek phrase. This is a different phrase from that, that really captures Exodus 3, when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush and Moses said, "Who is this talking to me?" And God said, "I am!" It's a clear statement that Jesus is declaring Himself to be God in the flesh. He is the God of the Old Testament. He's the creator God of Genesis 1. He is the God who has existed forever, who has taken on human flesh, sent by the Father to be the Savior of the world. It's clear in verse 59, by the response of the people, they understand exactly what He just said, and that's why they are picking up stones to kill Him. They believe He is guilty of blasphemy.

So let's put this whole thing together and make a little sense of it. What Jesus has said consistently from the beginning of John's Gospel on, is that He is God in the flesh. He is the eternal God, the Creator of the universe, whom the Father sent to take on human flesh, in order to explain to people, "This is true. This is the way of salvation. This is what it takes to stand right before a holy God." That's why Jesus said, "You shall know the truth. Follow Me. Listen to Me. Believe what I have to say and you'll know the truth and it's the truth that will set you free." And because Jesus is the ultimate judge at the end of the story, if He sets you free, you're free indeed! It doesn't matter what anybody else says. As long as Jesus declares you free, you're free indeed. Even if I die, I will live for those who believe. It's simply the transition from this life into the presence of Jesus, destined for a future more glorious than we could begin to describe.

But the problem is that these people are so entrenched in their religion, that they don't need Jesus. As long as we think religion can make us right before God—that somehow religion can make us acceptable to God—that doesn't become a pathway to God. It becomes the very barrier to God. As long as through religion I can make myself right, I don't need Jesus. So here you have highly religious Jews, and Jesus is saying to them, "You don't get it. You don't understand. If you knew God, you would know Me, and you would love Me. But your problem is you don't get it. You don't get it because your father is the devil. The devil is a liar and the father of lies, and he has lied to you so

much that you actually think that, on the basis of your good works, on the basis of your religious activity, you can make it to God. And, because of that, you're not interested in what Jesus has to say.

I understand the confusion people have in our world today. All of these religions are making all kinds of truth claims, all of them claiming that they are the way to God. But either what Jesus said is true or he's a liar. There's no middle ground on this. Jesus is saying that God sent Him in order to explain, "This is the way to God. This is the way to be set free from the enslavement of sin. This is the way to find spiritual life, to become spiritually alive and once we become spiritually alive, even when we die, we'll live." There's no reason to live in fear of all these things in this world we can't control. No matter what happens, the end of the story is glorious, and we have every reason to be at peace, to be at rest, and to believe that God is in charge.

One of the most familiar verses of the Bible is John 3:16:

"For God so loved the world, that He sent His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have everlasting life."

John 6:47: *Whoever believes has eternal life.*

John 11:25 *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will have life, even if he dies."*

John 14:6 *Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; nobody comes to the Father, but through Me.*

The message of the Gospel of John that John is asking us to believe is that we might have life...is that Jesus came to do for us what religion could never do for us...is that He would become our sacrifice. He would become our substitute on the cross. He would die our death. He would pay our debt, in order that He might offer forgiveness...that He might offer salvation...that He might offer life with God, so that we might experience forgiveness—freedom from our sin, our shame, our guilt, our addictions, our fears, and our anxieties. But more than that; no matter what happens, we know that even if we die, we live. And the promise is we live forever in a new heaven and a new earth—the place our souls so long for today. It's not offered through religion. It's offered as a gift that everyone chooses to either reject or to receive. The question is, "Does Jesus tell the truth?" My prayer is that you will choose to believe that, in this confusion of religion, Jesus has come to tell us the truth, that we might believe! Let's pray:

Our Father, we are so thankful that when we were lost in our sin, You sent Jesus to be the Savior of the world. God, there's just got to be people listening today that are just so confused with all the religious claims in the world. But may You speak to their hearts, that they might know that Jesus came to tell the truth, that we might experience new life in Jesus, life today, and life forever. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Opening Discussion

1. What has been your own story of trying to sort through and understand what is true and not true related to God and religion?

2. How did you come to understand the truth? What were the biggest obstacles you faced along the way?

Bible Study

1. Read John 8:31-33. What is it that sets us free and what does that mean? Why does the truth set us free?

2. Read John 8:34-38. What do you think it means to be a “slave to sin?” How does Romans 6:1-11 add to this discussion?

3. Read John 8:39-47. Jesus literally states that the Devil speaks “the lie” in verse 44. Compare what Jesus says with Genesis 3:1-7. What is “the lie?”

4. Compare also 2 Corinthians 11:13-15. How does Satan disguise himself as an angel of light in the context of that passage?

5. Read John 8:48-59. Compare Jesus’ words with John 3:16; 6:47; 11:25, 26. What does Jesus promise? How does that truth “set us free?”

6. What does Jesus claim in 8:58? Compare Ex.3:14. If Jesus were to come to earth as a man today and confront the religions of the world how do you think He’d be received? Why?

