

Chris Montovino  
John 8:31-59  
March 16, 2025

## Temperature Rises

I'm curious this morning. Where do you go for news about what is happening in our country and the world? How do you know it is true? How do you know if they aren't making things up in order to promote a certain political agenda? How do you know that they aren't just hyping up the facts to sell ratings? How much time do you spend in watching the news each week? How much time do you spend in the Word of God? I bet we can guess which is shaping us more!

In today's scripture the temperature is rising between Jesus and those who opposed him. They were having a discussion about truth and their sources of truth. It was so intense that by the end, people picked up stones to stone Jesus, but he slipped away.

How can that be for God's people?

Sadly, it happens. When we allow our minds to be shaped by other narratives than Jesus', we can stoop to things never imaginable. And so it is crucial to step outside our heads from time to time and ask, is what I am allowing myself to be shaped by true of God?

Please join me as we read from John 8:31-59 as we see for ourselves.

**31** Jesus spoke to the Jews who had believed him. "If you obey my teaching," he said, "you are really my disciples. **32** Then you will know the truth. And the truth will set you free."

**33** They answered him, "We are Abraham's children. We have never been slaves of anyone. So how can you say that we will be set free?"

**34** Jesus replied, "What I'm about to tell you is true. Everyone who sins is a slave of sin. **35** A slave has no lasting place in the family. But a son belongs to the family forever. **36** So if the Son of Man sets you free, you will really be free. **37** I know that you are Abraham's children. But you are looking for a way to kill me. You have no room for my word. **38** I am telling you what I saw when I was with my Father. You are doing what you have heard from your father."

**39** "Abraham is our father," they answered.

Jesus said, "Are you really Abraham's children? If you are, you will do what Abraham did. **40** But you are looking for a way to kill me. I am a man who has told you the truth I heard from God. Abraham didn't do the things you want to do.

**41** You are doing what your own father does."

“We have the right to claim to be God’s children,” they objected. “The only Father we have is God himself.”

**42** Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me. I have come here from God. I have not come on my own. God sent me. **43** Why aren’t my words clear to you? Because you can’t really hear what I say. **44** You belong to your father, the devil. You want to obey your father’s wishes. From the beginning, the devil was a murderer. He has never obeyed the truth. There is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his natural language. He does this because he is a liar. He is the father of lies. **45** But because I tell the truth, you don’t believe me! **46** Can any of you prove I am guilty of sinning? Am I not telling the truth? Then why don’t you believe me? **47** Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you don’t hear is that you don’t belong to God.”

**48** The Jews answered Jesus, “Aren’t we right when we say you are a Samaritan? Aren’t you controlled by a demon?”

**49** “I am not controlled by a demon,” said Jesus. “I honor my Father. You do not honor me. **50** I am not seeking glory for myself. But there is one who brings glory to me. He is the judge. **51** What I’m about to tell you is true. Whoever obeys my word will never die.”

**52** Then they cried out, “Now we know you are controlled by a demon! Abraham died. So did the prophets. But you say that whoever obeys your word will never die. **53** Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died. So did the prophets. Who do you think you are?”

**54** Jesus replied, “If I bring glory to myself, my glory means nothing. You claim that my Father is your God. He is the one who brings glory to me. **55** You do not know him. But I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him. And I obey his word. **56** Your father Abraham was filled with joy at the thought of seeing my day. He saw it and was glad.”

**57** “You are not even 50 years old,” they said to Jesus. “And you have seen Abraham?”

**58** “What I’m about to tell you is true,” Jesus answered. “Before Abraham was born, I am!” **59** When he said this, they picked up stones to kill him. But Jesus hid himself. He slipped away from the temple area.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

As I was selecting scriptures for this sermon series in John, I looked at texts that aren’t often preached. I think I know why. These are not easy ones to work with. But necessary.

There are several questions that we can answer of today’s text that will help us better understand. Who were the Jews with whom Jesus had such heated

conversations? What was the essence behind their disagreement? What was the source of their truth verses Jesus' truth? What is the truth and what did Jesus say knowing the truth would do for us? How can we discern truth today? What is the Spirit saying to us through this?

So can we guess what today's message might be about? Truth. The word truth is mentioned ten times in just twenty seven verses. So I think that must be it.

I've mentioned previously that whenever John talked about "The Jews," he was not making blanket statements about all Jewish people. He was referring to a particular group who opposed the things he was saying about himself. Namely, the religious leaders and teachers of the Law.

But I think today's text indicates that this group was growing. Verse 31 says "To the Jews who HAD believed him, Jesus said..." The Greek word for believed used here is pepisteukotas. It means "had believed" him meaning that at one point they did, but now they did not. So what changed?

If we go back to John Chapter 6, we see that crowds of people believed in Jesus and started following him because he had just fed five thousand people with five small barley loaves and two small fish. And then he told them that he was the bread that had come down from heaven and that they needed to eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Verse 60 says, "On hearing this, many of his disciples said, "This is hard teaching. Who can accept it?" Verse 66 says, "From this time on many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him."

I think these are those who "HAD believed" Jesus but no longer did and to whom Jesus was now talking.

What is the essence of their disagreement? It was about truth and their sources of truth.

Jesus said, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free. I tell you the truth. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence. I have told you the truth that I heard from God."

So clearly Jesus claimed that his source of truth was God the Father himself. Kind of hard to argue with that.

But what about the Jews? What were their truth claims?

First they said, "We are Abraham's descendants." That was true. "And have never been slaves of anyone." Now, that was not true. The Jewish people were enslaved the Egyptians, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, the Syrians, and now the Romans. How could they truthfully say that they had never been enslaved?

Jesus caught them in a red handed lie which was a break of the Ten Commandments or the Law. So he said, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is

a slave to sin.” Not only that but he knew that they were ready to kill him, again another break of the commandments.

And then Jesus said, “I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

The word “Father” is repeated some eleven times. So the other theme in this text is about who’s father is who and the different sources of truth.

Jesus’ father was God himself.

The Jews claimed, “Abraham is our father.” When Jesus questioned them about that claim since Abraham wouldn’t do what they were doing right now, they resorted to slander and name calling.

“At least we know who our father is,” they protested. [You are an illegitimate child. My paraphrasing.] “The only Father we have is God himself.”

Now wait a minute. Do we get the madness of their thinking here? Jesus has caught them red handed in sin, confronted them, and they just make matters worse. Do you see what they just claimed? By claiming God as their Father they were committing the exact same “blasphemy” that they accused Jesus of by making himself equal with God as a son.

Jesus knew where their hearts were going with this and called them out again. Notice how Jesus goes in like an expert surgeon and extracts the cancer that is killing them in one fell swoop.

He said, “Your father is the devil who was a liar from the beginning and is that father of lies.”

Further he said, “You can’t prove me guilty of any wrong doing and I am telling you the truth and yet won’t believe me. Everyone who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you don’t hear is that you don’t belong to God.”

I think we can safely say that this conversation wasn’t going very well. The Jews knew that Jesus was right and they were wrong. So instead of confessing their sin and being set free from it, which Jesus encouraged them to do. They dug in and called Jesus a Samaritan and demon possessed man.

Folks pay attention here.

This is how we see Babylon rear its ugly head today. This is how the enemy works! Whenever Satan feels like he is losing control, he makes up his own truth, repeats it over and over again until people believe it. And then he says bad things about other people, even calls them names. When we see this in society today, we are seeing the work of the devil. This is not the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

It is imperative that we as God’s people know how to discern between the two.

So then how can we tell truth today? The world’s truth changes from day to day, like grass floating in the wind. Jesus’ truth is consistent with who God is and what God has said in his Word. It doesn’t change from age to age, or season to

season. What was true yesterday, is true today, will be true tomorrow. And Jesus has given us the gift of his Holy Spirit that lives in us to help us discern what is true from what is false.

What is the Spirit saying to us?

I think we are each being called to examine our discipleship and asking “Are we truly abiding in Christ’s Word? Are we equipping ourselves to be able to discern false voices today? Or are just letting ourselves be shaped by the world’s view?”

In this season of Lent which is the forty days leading up to Easter, I believe the Spirit of God is calling us to get serious about the things that hinder us from living freely as God’s people. We do this not because we are afraid of being punished. No! We do it because God loves us so much that he wants to live in freedom, and not bondage.

What is God calling us to let go of? Could we commit to giving it up for the next five weeks?

N.T. Wright uses the following illustration to "describe how we should avoid [sin] and embrace the way of Jesus":

Think of an animal you'd really be afraid of, whether it's an angry rhinoceros or a large spider. If you came round a corner and found yourself facing it, what would you want to do? Run away, of course. Well, [as a follower of Jesus] that's how you should feel about [what separates us from God].

Then think how you'd feel if you saw the person you loved best in the entire world, who you hadn't seen for years, walking down the street. What would you do? Why, chase after [them], of course. That's how you should behave when you think of Jesus and the new life that he is offering you and the whole world.<sup>1</sup>

Friends, are we embracing the freedom that God intends for us live in, or are we still living in bondage to sin?

The Apostle Paul said, “For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> And to the Galatians he said, “It is for freedom that you have been set free [from sin]. Stand firm then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.”<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from N.T. Wright, Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Epistles (Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), page 76

<sup>2</sup> Romans 3:23-24

<sup>3</sup> Galatians 5:1

1 John proclaims, “ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives.”<sup>4</sup>

Do we believe this?

If we do, then we are living out our spiritual heritage as children of God. Do our words and deeds reflect Jesus’ character as they should? The more we abide in Jesus, the more he shines through us. We become less and the become greater.

These are things that the Spirit is calling to us today.

So may we, like, Abraham, rejoice to see Christ’s day. May we move beyond superficial belief to genuine discipleship. And may our lives be transformed by the truth that sets us free.

Amen.

---

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 1:5-10