

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, our Lord, and our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We've heard the assigned text for this day, John 8. I would like to read the whole conversation and then make several points regarding it. As we read, it may be helpful for you to follow along; I'm reading from the ESV translation.

You may also find it valuable to consider the tone of the conversation: Is Jesus speaking nicely to these people, and why or why not?

Finally, consider as you listen: Do I agree with Jesus or the Jews in this case?

John 8:31–59 (ESV) **The Truth Will Set You Free**

³¹ So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” 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’?”

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. ³⁷ I know that you are offspring of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you. ³⁸ I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

You Are of Your Father the Devil

³⁹ 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, ⁴⁰ 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. ⁴¹ You are doing the works your father did.” They said to him, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father—even God.” 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. ⁴³ Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. ⁴⁴ 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. ⁴⁵ But because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. ⁴⁶ Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.”

Before Abraham Was, I Am

⁴⁸ The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” ⁴⁹ Jesus answered, “I do not have a demon, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. ⁵⁰ Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ⁵¹ Truly,

truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”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.’”⁵³ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you make yourself out to be?”⁵⁴ 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.’”⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.”⁵⁷ So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?”⁵⁸ Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.”⁵⁹ So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

You catch more flies with honey than you do with vinegar.

Doesn't Jesus understand this English proverb? Is he so stupid that he does not realise he will never get a following while speaking in these ways to people? John tells us in the narrative, ‘Jesus said to the Jews who had **believed** him’, but he concludes the conversation, ‘So they picked up stones to throw at him’.

What causes a conversation to begin with faith and end with attempted murder? Has Jesus got it so utterly wrong that he is antagonising to the point of their attempt to stone him the very people he should be winning over?

If that is your response, you might have to realise Jesus is on earth to do something very different to what we might first expect, and unfortunately, you might have more in common with the Jews described here than with the faithful disciples.

Is it Jesus' task to win friends and influence people? Could his whole mission, both then and now, have been much more productive if he had only had a marketing team and a positive attitude? The text reveals that this is not his mission, he is not interested in the power of positive thinking. His sole purpose is to set people free with the truth. Sometimes, the truth hurts, sometimes, it is excruciating, and sometimes, the truth destroys all my self-confidence and security because the truth is I want to believe in everything but Jesus. For the Jews in our story, they can't handle the truth!

If we consider this in the law gospel paradigm that Lutherans love, how do you read this contentious phrase from Jesus? ‘If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples,³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.’ Is it Law or Gospel?

If you hear that Jesus wants to deliver you the truth and set you free, you will understand that this is Gospel. It is a sweet promise: Jesus will give me everything I need for eternal life!

If you are like the Jews who want to believe in Jesus but can't handle the truth, all you will understand is Law. ‘Abide’ - do something, law, command, impossible. ‘Truly my disciples’ –

‘are you saying we don’t really belong to you, Jesus? Are you saying we don’t belong to God the Father?’ ‘Truth’ – ‘I’m not deceived by lies’? ‘Free’ – ‘I’m not enslaved, you samaritan demoniac’.

If you hear Law, you will fight and rail with Jesus just like the Jews did and in the end, they try to kill him for blasphemy. If you know Jesus’ true purpose and have heard the truth, you will comprehend a pure, comforting gospel.

This is the same for these words: ‘Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ And “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” These are beautiful Gospel proclamations that Jesus is God. He is the one that Abraham was waiting for, the one that Adam was waiting for, the one the whole Old Testament was waiting for, and here he is delivering salvation! But the Jews who can’t handle the truth see only Law and blasphemy. They are condemned as they hear this.

This is the same with preaching. If you understand that preaching is designed to make you feel good, that is all you will be looking for, and most often, you will be disappointed because I’m not here to make you feel good. I’m not here to deliver to you a positive message in a negative world; I’m here to deliver Christ, who comes in both Law and Gospel, and that is going to hurt. In the book we recently read for bible study, Pastor Weedon puts it thus:

God did not send the preacher to your congregation to make you happy. God really is not ultimately interested in your happiness and neither should you be. He sent the preacher there to make you holy by speaking the Word to you that alone can do that job. And holiness is a thousand times better than happiness. Happiness literally hangs on what is happening in a moment of time. Holiness is sharing in God’s own divine life forever; and that is true, indestructible blessedness and joy.

Jesus’ purpose, and my purpose is not to market to you and make you like me, make you happy, or appease your desires. Our purpose is to have you found in Christ, to have you saved for all eternity. That always means pointing out your sin by submitting to God so that Jesus can give you all the benefits that he won for you on the cross. Only the sick need a physician. I don’t want you to be found with the Jews ready to stone Jesus because he spoke the truth to them; I don’t want you to argue with Jesus about his authority, word or truth; I want you to be in Jesus, in his word!

We don’t get to decide what Jesus can and can’t say based on our modern sensibilities; he is God. He created. He does what he likes with his creation, ‘where were you when he laid the foundation?’ He is God. He saves us in his way; we don’t get to choose to be saved by methods of our own design; we are only saved by him in his specific way through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He is God; he determines the order in creation, the commands we are to follow, the length of our life, and the words we are to hear; we are not in a position to pick and choose.

We are not over and above Jesus, so we cannot say, ‘That passage was relevant then, but we can ignore it now’. He determines what words are relevant and to whom. We are not over and

above the Scriptures; we are under the Scriptures; if we are not, we find ourselves outside of Christ! You want to be under Scripture so that you are in Christ. This is what Jesus means when he invites the listeners to 'abide in his word'. Abide literally means stay, remain, as in the place that you live. You are invited to live in the Word. We should understand it to firstly mean belief, trust, or have faith in that Word, but by extension, that means obeying the commands found therein, and finally, it means we stick to that Word as the only way to eternal life. Or better still, we stick to Jesus, the Word, as the only source and giver of eternal life. Not as a burdensome command but as freedom from attempting to earn salvation by our own works and goodness. Freedom from the punishment that is due to us all, the punishment that is sin and comes from sin. Jesus is pure freedom!

Amen

The Peace of God that surpasses all our understanding keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus.

Amen.