

Text: John 8:30-59

Title: "Believe because He knows for sure if we do"

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Place: NBBC

Introduction: During vacation Bible school, Mike was teaching a Bible lesson about the sin of lying. He found a string of videos of young children trying to lie to their parents. It was a cute thing to watch, but also sadly incontrovertible evidence that we parents have passed along our fallen sinful nature to our offspring, just like the Bible says that we have. The kids seemed even able to repeat their lie until they believed themselves that it was true. They get that ability from us parents as well.

One thing that every lie told in that series of videos had in common with the others was that the parents could see right through it. The parents had complete knowledge of the reality of the situation. One child had dug into frosting on a cake, and he claimed he had not touched the cake with blue frosting all over his face. His mom and dad were not fooled. These parents hoped unsuccessfully to encourage their kids to tell the truth by giving them many chances. And no matter how many times the child insisted that his lie was true, the parents knew for sure the truth.

John wrote his Gospel so that his readers would believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name (20:31). As he does so, he is greatly concerned that this believing on Christ be done with truly saving, life-changing faith. This part of chapter 8 addresses that concern once again. In our passage, Jesus deals with a kind of profession of faith that is more false than true, and He is no more fooled than are parents who hear the lies of their little children, who have frosting all over their face.

John's message is clear. We must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name, because He knows for sure whether we truly believe. A child might fool others with his lie, but his parents know him too well. To them especially, they should tell the truth. And we professing believers may cause others to think that we believe, but Jesus knows for sure. I want us to see three things Jesus tells these Jews that He knows for sure as they profess faith in Him in verse 30.

I. Jesus knew for sure what true saving faith is (vv. 30-36).

Illustration: Opobo is a river town near the southern coast of Nigeria. In the center of town stands a statue memorializing a 19th century African king named Jaja. Jaja is remembered by Nigerians as one of the last African kings to control the palm oil trade conducted by the houses or city-states of that region before the British took over. He was lured on to a British warship for what was supposed to be a peaceful council, and after boarding he found himself on trial and eventually sentenced to exile to St. Vincent in the West Indies.

Africans remember King Jaja in part because of his humble beginnings. He had come to that region because, as a boy of 12 years of age, he had been sold as a slave by other Africans. Like Joseph in Egypt, Jaja rose in the House of Opobo to become powerful enough to break from another city-state and to establish his own house with himself as king.

Application: That kind of story is a remarkable one in history, because ordinarily it is the son, not the slave, who is the freeman and heir of the house. Jesus uses this truth about houses and their sons to tell these Jews that it is the Son who must make a slave free in God's house (vv. 35-36).

Later in the Gospel of John, Jesus will refer again to God's house (14:1-6, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions [*dwelling places or rooms*]: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me").

God's house is Jesus's Father's house. He is the only Son of the house, so no man comes to the Father but by Him. There is room in the house for many, but only one Son who is the way, the truth, and the life of the house. In our passage, the Son is also the one who grants the slave's freedom. Jesus knows for sure that true saving faith results in the Son freeing a slave so that he can dwell in God's house.

Notice that this blessing comes only to the lives of slaves. True saving faith believes first that we are slaves, which was what the faith of the Jews missed (vv. 33-34). These Jews, of course, were subjects of the Roman Empire. Politically, they were a people that had been enslaved by other nations many times, even from their beginning in Egypt.

But these Jews still believed that they were free as sons of Abraham. Their belief is what we Baptists call *individual soul liberty*, and our country's forefathers, *freedom of conscience*. James Madison defines the doctrine in his *Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments*, 1785: "The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every

man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right. It is unalienable, because the opinions of men, depending only on the evidence contemplated by their own minds cannot follow the dictates of other men. It is unalienable also, because what is here a right towards men, is a duty towards the Creator. It is the duty of every man to render to the Creator such homage and such only as he believes to be acceptable to Him. This duty is precedent, both in order of time and in degree of obligation, to the claims of Civil Society. Before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe."

Jesus does not deny these Jews their freedom of conscience, but He reminds them of a slavery they were forgetting, a truth most Americans forget as well. True, their conscience was not enslaved to any man, but they missed that their hearts were enslaved to their sin of unbelief. Freedom of conscience does us little eternal good if we stay the slave of our own sin. We need the freedom that saves us from sin.

Jesus begins this conversation by telling these Jews what people who have this freedom do (vv. 31-32). True disciples remain in Jesus's word just as surely as men truly free walk out of their prison cells. Salvation sets true disciples free from sin (Rom. 6:18, 22), free from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8:2), and free from bondage to corruption (Rom. 8:21). The Jews believed their freedom came from the Law. Jesus tells them it comes to the slaves of unbelief through the Son, and He is this Son. It comes through Him because He paid the price of our redemption with His blood on the cross of Calvary. He is the One who can free slaves of sin, and He is the one who knows for sure what saving faith is.

II. Jesus knew for sure what true saving faith is not (vv. 37-47).

Illustration: Maureen and I attended the funeral of a dear friend this past Thursday. She knew the Lord, and we who loved her dearly found great comfort from Him that day. She has four married daughters, but one of those has gone through the tragedy of divorce. Her ex-husband was there and stayed for the wonderful meal that was provided for us and for our time of fellowship together.

After I had poured a cup at the coffee table, this ex-husband approached and greeted me. We had an awkward chat for a minute or so about things that do not really matter, and then I told him that I had heard that he and his wife were now divorced. He confirmed they were. I asked him if he had remarried, and he replied that he had not and that it had only been a year and a half. Then I mentioned to this friend and professing brother-in-the-Lord that all of our families have an enemy that wants to destroy them, and all of the rest of us are on the same side against him. He seemed to agree and take that truth to heart. I told him I would pray for his family.

Application: Jesus describes this same enemy in our passage. He is the father of these Jews with their false faith, and he is the one who makes them want to kill Jesus, which they will attempt to do by the end of this chapter.

The first promise of salvation in Gen. 3:15 told us not only of the descendant of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent, the Lord Jesus Christ, but also of the descendants of the serpent, who would bruise the foot of the woman's descendent, these Jews. For this reason, Jesus tells them their father is the devil, and that in their desire to kill Him they are doing his work predicted long ago.

Jesus describes Satan as a murderer from the beginning. *The beginning* Jesus refers to here is the beginning of creation,

the beginning of the existence of the universe, which John refers to in the first verse of his Gospel – “In the beginning was the Word.” From that beginning, Satan began to murder. Every death experienced by God’s creation since the beginning is traceable to murder committed by Satan. The death of every unborn child, the death of every marriage vow, the death of every dear one lowered into a grave is traceable to the murder committed by Satan in Genesis 3.

He committed the crime with the first lie ever told on earth, making him the father of lies. He told Eve, “You shall not surely die. For the Lord knows that in the day that you eat of the forbidden tree you shall be like gods knowing good and evil.” “You will be your own god and possess the authority to say for yourself what is good and what is evil.” In other words, “You will be free.” When Jesus says, “You are a slave in your sin of unbelief,” Satan says, “No, you are free in your right to not believe.”

How can it be that anyone would believe the lie of Satan and reject the truth of Christ? Jesus asks that question (vv. 43, 46). Notice that these Jews reject both Jesus’s word and His speech. *Speech* refers to the way Jesus communicates truth, and *word* refers to the content of the truth Jesus communicates. Verse 43 tells us that both the way Jesus spoke and what He said came from the Father. Jesus obeyed the Father’s will, not only in what He said, but also in how He said it, the vehicle of communication as well as its content.

We must not only faithfully say what God says, but also we must say it the way He says it. To be Christlike, we must never speak God’s truth with the help of the world’s lies, even though it may seem the world will not hear us. Jesus gives some reasons the Jews made the choice they did, showing it was not because of the way He said what

He said: (1) "because My word is not progressing in you" (v. 37); (2) "because Satan is your father, not Abraham" (vv. 38-41); (3) "because you love other things instead of me" (v. 42; "born of fornication" showed their hatred; Paul mentions three loves that replace the love we should have for Christ – the love of self, the love of money, and the love of pleasure (2 Tim. 3:2-4)); (4) "because Jesus told them the truth," and it turns out our natures prefer our comfortable lies (v. 45); and (5) "because they were not of God" (v. 47). So Jesus knew what saving faith is not, and He was not fooled by the shallow profession of these Jews. What would He say about our profession of faith?

III. Jesus knew for sure that He is worthy of saving faith (vv. 48-59).

Illustration: I mentioned that on Thursday Maureen and I attended the funeral of a dear sister in Christ. Her son-in-law, a pastor in Old Saybrook, CT, preached from John 11 that afternoon. As we were gathered around a casket with husband and daughters and their families in tears, we heard the wonderful words that Jesus told Martha just before calling Lazarus out of the tomb: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

Application: Jesus says the same to these Jews with their shallow false faith (v. 51). He tells them that He is the eternal I Am of Exodus 3 (v. 58), just like he told Martha when He said "I Am the resurrection and the life." The Jews had seen many Jewish caskets, and they knew where the tombs of Abraham and the prophets were, and so they reject what Jesus tells them. They take up stones to stone their I Am.

Their response was sadly different than that of Martha's. Jesus asked her, "Do you believe this?", and she responded, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world." These Jews at first sounded a lot like Martha (v. 30), but when their hearts were exposed, what they truly believed surfaced – "Say we not well that you are a Samaritan, and have a devil?" (v. 48); "Now we know that you have a devil" (v. 52), "Who do you think you are?" (v. 53); and so their answer in the end was, "No, we really do not believe."

Conclusion: The church father Augustine reflects on Jesus's departure from these Jews in verse 59 with a solemn warning for us: "Jesus flees from the stones, but woe to those from whose heart of stone God flees." May we truly believe on Christ and have life in His name, because He knows for sure whether we do.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*