

[Transcript] The News Agents / Boris Johnson Swears He's Telling the Truth

This is a global player original podcast.

For a man whose relationship with the truth has been strained and very well documented, this was quite a moment when the committee clerk held a copy of the King James Bible and Boris Johnson, former Prime Minister, put his hand on it.

I'm just going to take the Bible and read out the terms of the oath.

Yes, I swear by Almighty God that the evidence I shall give for this committee should be the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

So help me God.

Thank you very much.

There are critics who will tell you that everything Boris Johnson touches turns toxic.

So right now imagine Christians everywhere slightly alarmed by the proximity of that King James Bible to Boris Johnson's hand.

Welcome to the News Agents.

The News Agents.

It's John.

It's Emily.

And it's Lewis.

And we are in the studio because the House of Commons is taking a break from the Privileges Committee hearing into whether Boris Johnson willfully, intentionally, recklessly misled Parliament.

And this carries with it quite some jeopardy for the former Prime Minister because it could end his political career.

Actually, if he's found to have lied, it could lead to perjury charges following that declaration on the oath of the Bible that he would tell the truth and the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

There's a lot being said about this committee, but just one thing worth pointing out.

Yes, there is a Labour chair, Harriet Harman, but it has a conservative majority.

Four conservative MPs, two Labour, one SMP.

It actually has to have a Labour head because that is how Parliamentary Committees work.

You have to have an opposition leader.

It was Chris Bryant.

He recused himself.

And now it is Harriet Harman, who is, as we know, a Labour grandee.

But it's important to recognise that the Inquisitor-in-Chief so far, and we're talking at 20 past three now, where the committee's been going probably just over an hour, has been Bernard Jenkins.

And don't forget that Bernard Jenkins is a fellow Conservative, a long-standing parliamentarian, a Brexiteer who has had no quibble with the leadership of Boris Johnson or his party for many years and yet is doing a pretty forensic job.

And why we started, I think it's important to say, with the King James Bible and with the swearing of the oath is because fundamentally, this is not really about parties.

This is not really about lockdown.

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This is about truth.

And it's about whether there was a willful attempt,
an intention to mislead the House,
because Boris Johnson, don't forget, when he was asked about it,
was categoric that all guidance and rules had been followed at the time.
He didn't stop and say, I think that's right, let me check.
He didn't stop and say, I've been advised that most of the time it was fine.
He didn't seem to have any qualms about it.

He told us, he told the House, he told the country
that rules and guidance had been followed at all times.

Yeah, and it is, again, we should just rewind a bit.

It's more than just Johnson.

And I can totally understand, I've spoken to people plenty
over the last few weeks, months, whatever.

It's like, well, we're still talking about partying.

God, aren't there more important things?

But as Emily said, this isn't really about parties anymore.

It is about, actually, and Harriet Harman referenced this at the very start,
our system of accountability in our democracy,

because you've got to remember and take a step back,
which is that for months and months and months,

I sat in on some of those meetings.

Number 10 told journalists, the media, and then the public,
not just Boris Johnson, the whole number 10 machine,

that these events, these gatherings, these rule-breaking gatherings
that we know for a fact happened because the police told us
and issued fines that they were rule-breaking, never even took place.

It wasn't just a case that, oh, well, you know, we're not sure.

Maybe there were some gray areas.

They told us they never even took place.

The media was lied to and the public were lied to as well.

And listening to Boris Johnson's opening statement to the committee,
where he's allowed to speak uninterrupted,

you kind of sense that from him, he bristled with anger and indignation
that, how dare you question my truthfulness?

And it was kind of Coriolanus going before the plebs,
you know, kind of, I shouldn't have to be doing this.

And yet he did.

I love that you know. That made us feel really big.

And I just thought that there was something in the way
Johnson was defending himself, that just he felt contempt
for having to be there.

And this is him protesting his innocence.

I am here to say to you, hand on heart, that I did not lie to the House.

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When those statements were made, they were made in good faith.
And on the basis of what I honestly knew and believed at the time.
When this inquiry was set up, I was completely confident
that you would find nothing to show I knew or believed anything else.
As indeed you have not.
I was confident not because there's been some kind of cover up.
I was confident because I knew that is what I believed.
And that is why I said it.
He hates it. He hates being there.
You can absolutely see it. He was prime minister a few months ago.
He absolutely loathes it.
He is convinced that, look, we can get to the nuts and bolts of his defense in a minute.
But he has been doing everything he can.
And his outriders and allies have been doing everything they can over the past few days.
And he was doing it again in the committee this afternoon
to try and denigrate the integrity and the probity of the committee.
And there were just little hints and we talked about Trump yesterday.
There was a little bit, John, when we were watching it, we turned to each other
and there was a little bit of the January 6th committees.
The way normally these sort of committees are very dry
and they're not very good at getting to the truth.
We talked about it yesterday. MPs often grandstand.
So far, A, that hasn't been the case, but B, they have been very effective
in laying out that evidence before him, showing him the clips as he sits there.
Great television and the public have to watch his reaction
as he sees what he unequivocally told the commons about those parties
following the guidance and the rules.
As millions of people were locked down last year,
was a Christmas party thrown in Downing Street
for dozens of people on December the 18th?
Right, Minister?
Mr Speaker, what I can tell the right honourable gentleman
is that all guidance was followed completely during number 10.
But I repeat, Mr Speaker, that I have been repeatedly assured
since these allegations emerged that there was no party
and that no COVID rules were broken,
and that is what I have been repeatedly assured.
I apologise for the impression that has been given
that staff in Downing Street take this less than seriously.
I am second myself and furious about that.
But I repeat what I have said to him,
that I have been repeatedly assured that the rules were not broken.
The Prime Minister has been caught red-handed.
Why doesn't he end the investigation right now by just admitting it?

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Because, Mr Speaker, I have been repeatedly assured that the rules were broken.

And I think there's one reason why this hasn't been dry, because they can be technical, they can be quite formulaic, they can be difficult to follow.

But I think this hasn't been dry because everyone listening to that and everyone in the country can tell you about their own sacrifices, their own trauma, their own trials, their own memories of exactly what they were going through when the Prime Minister was explaining why it was so fundamental that he held leaving gatherings.

I think he referred them at one stage as rapid gatherings.

The best sort of gatherings.

It was essential for work purposes, quote unquote, from Boris Johnson that there should be a party.

And it was so impromptu that everyone had glasses of wine in their hand, they managed to get the booze in, they managed to get the wine glasses in.

Right, essential.

And everyone will be able to tell you the things that they cancelled because they didn't think they were that essential.

And I think this is the rub of Bernard Jenkins' question when he takes us back to those press conferences, those very socially distanced, televised press conferences, and says, what have you been asked this?

So if you've been asked at a press conference with your podium saying hands face space, whether it was OK for organisations to hold unsocially distanced farewell gatherings in the workplace, what would you have said?

I would have said that it's up to organisations, as the guidance says, to decide how and they are going to implement the guidance amongst which is, of course, social distancing, where they can't do social distancing perfectly, they can't maintain two metres or one metres, then they're entitled to have mitigations.

And that's what the guidance says.

And we did indeed have plenty of mitigation.

The thing that struck me listening to that question, you know, so often politicians would say, well, that's a hypothetical question, I'm not going to answer it. Boris Johnson did try to answer it and got himself in knots, because everyone in the room where we were sitting just said, no way, that's not what we thought.

Yeah, OK, maybe a bit stronger,

because that's not what anyone thought at the time,

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that it would have been OK to have a party in those circumstances.
It would specifically not have been OK.

We cancelled those parties.

That was a guided missile from Bernard Jenkins
to ask that question in that way.

Boris Johnson engaged with it and found himself in some bluster.

Can you imagine Matt Hancock at the time,
when we watched those press conferences,
can you imagine Matt Hancock,
and this is part of his personal problems on all of this as well,
can you imagine, you remember when they used to ask
at the very beginning of the press conferences,
because they wanted to throw some shade on the journalists,
say the public are more important,
so they took a couple of video questions.

And the Zoom never worked.

And the Zoom never really worked, but you know,
can you imagine if there had been some business owner
and staff here, they're doing some great work.

I'd love to be able to say goodbye to them,
thinking I'll have a couple of bottles of champagne, let it stay.

Would that be OK? Is that within the guidance?

Can you imagine Matt Hancock or Johnson being like,
yeah, I'll just look at that.

Yeah, do your best to maintain distancing, if you can.

But of course, no way, no way.

But the defence has been very interesting,
because it has been about measurements and screens,
and the corridors, the antiquated force fields,
and the corridors,

so difficult to work at Downing Street.

Forgive me, I bet there were harder places to do your job,
physically, than Downing Street.

Nursing homes? Right.

Hospitals, wards, you name it,
and yet he keeps on talking us through
the antiquated corridors of Downing Street.

This Georgian townhouse.

And when he was asked if it ever occurred to him
to cancel these leaving dues, he said,

no, not for a moment,

because he sees himself as the thanker-in-chief,
as so fundamentally important to that role,
to say goodbye to his staff, not to thank nurses,

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not to thank doctors, not to go around the country,
sort of thanking people who are saving lives,
to thank his own staff in brackets who are leaving.
I expected, as we said yesterday,
lots of people below Johnson
to get blamed from a great height to that.
I didn't expect number 10 itself,
the building of number 10,
the layout of number 10 to turn out to be the great villain
that Johnson was talking about.
Honestly, God, that building.
What was in my head
was based on my understanding of the rules and the guidance.
That did not mean that I believed
that social distancing was complied with perfectly.
That is because I and others in the building
did not believe it was necessary or possible
to have a two-meter, or one meter after June 24, 2020,
electrified force field around every human being.
Indeed, that is emphatically not what the guidance prescribes.
It specifically says that social distancing
should be maintained where possible,
having regard to the work environment.
And it is clear that in number 10,
we had real difficulties in both working efficiently
and at speed, and in maintaining perfect social distancing.
It's a cramped, narrow, 18th century townhouse.
But also, look, let's understand it.
Central to Boris Johnson's defence is that he said
that he was giving information to the House of Commons
on the basis of the advice from individuals,
and that was the best to his knowledge,
and he was always faithfully giving that to the Commons.
And yet, in the testimony published today
from Simon Case, the Cabinet Secretary,
where he was asked, did this meet all the standards? No.
Did Boris Johnson ever ask whether it met all the standards? No.
And you saw a gaping hole put in Boris Johnson's defence
by the Cabinet Secretary?
Not just one gaping hole, but a couple more.
Martin Reynolds, who was Johnson's principal private secretary
at the time, said that he advised him not to say
that all guidance had been followed at all times.
Martin Reynolds said it was not a realistic position.

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And from what we understand,
this is the testimony of Martin Reynolds,
but Johnson then deleted that.
He agreed to delete that line from his speech in the Commons,
but he didn't.
He went ahead and said it.
We should just sort of break down
exactly what Johnson is saying his defence is.
We sort of knew this from yesterday, from his written statement.
But essentially, what he's relying on
is partly what you've just said, John,
which is that as Prime Minister, he acted on advice at all times.
Well, we know from these documents
that there is a massive question mark about that.
He keeps talking about, using this phrase,
the guidance as I understood it, or the guidance to me,
which again is problematic,
because the guidance was the guidance was the guidance.
There was always an element of interpretation,
but ultimately, as the ultimate arbiter of that
as the Prime Minister,
it seems very hard to sort of rest on that subjectivity.
And also, again, as we've already said,
a crux of his defence for why he didn't mislead Parliament
is because he is saying that it didn't even occur to him
that any of these events might not be reasonably necessary for work.
Now, all three of those things, as we've said,
and as they're talking about in the committee right now,
are looking extremely shaky.
And that is the question that Bernard Jenkins has been lasering in on
about kind of what did you understand,
not whether it was justified,
but how could you possibly report to the Commons this
when that had happened inside?
Well, I'm asking about the guidance at the moment.
Yes, and I'm telling you that I believe the guidance was...
So, what you've got to understand, when I looked at that group,
it did not, for one second, occur to me
that we were in breach of the guidance
given the logistical difficulties we faced in number 10
and the need to have urgent meetings such as this.
It's fair to say that you didn't say that we did every effort
to comply with the guidance to the House of Commons,
and you didn't say that social distancing...

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No, I'm saying that we followed the guidance completely.

Because you can't...

We'll come to this in a minute.

But you can't expect human beings in an environment like number 10 to have, as it were, an invisible electrified fence around them.

They will occasionally drift into each other's orbit.

When I saw that, it did not mean to me that we had breached the guidance.

It means it meant that we were following the guidance to the best of our ability, which was what the guidance provided for.

I'm going to throw one bit of shade into this,

which is a point that Boris Johnson makes,

which I do think is valid, or at least needs consideration.

And that is about the official photographer,

because he keeps on telling us that if he had, for any moment,

for any reason, doubted that those gatherings were not kosher,

why would he have had an official photographer there?

And I'm really excited to see what the Commons,

what that inquiry does with that.

Well, let me just kind of give a quick answer.

Yes, the official photographer was there to record

were any of those photos ever put up contemporaneously

on the Downing Street website,

which is where the official photographer's work goes?

Not a bit of it.

They didn't put up one photo of a party taking place at the time,

because they knew it would be so tough.

But in addition to that, you can also say,

why was the official photographer there?

Why does any work-gathering event,

if it's reasonably necessary to work,

do you really need the official photographer there?

And this goes to the whole point of this,

which is there is clearly a way,

there is a thought lurking orbiting around all of this,

which is just, frankly,

and what the Prime Minister is still trying to deflect from,

the number 10 was extremely, as we said yesterday,

luce was not particularly effective at implementing its own rules.

And that is why you end up with the official photographer there,

because no one is thinking,

actually, do we really need the official photographer there?

Well, some people were. That's the point.

Some people were thinking that.

They were saying it out loud.

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They were advising him not to go as strongly in his defence as he then went.

We're going to take a break, not least, because we've run out of breath, but also because Boris Johnson is back giving evidence to the committee and we're going to listen in for a bit and then come back.

More in a second.

This is The News Agents.

Welcome back.

And what's happening at the committee now is that every MP is getting a go of going through a couple of the parties, not parties, essential work events, rapid gatherings in prompt two things, where there was wine, cheese, beer, all the rest of it, and trying to go through, well, what did you know about these?

And when you said that they were socially distanced, did you really mean that?

No, not so much.

One of the interesting ironies that I have loved so far is Boris Johnson leaning heavily on Sue Gray's report to kind of get him out of trouble.

That's the same Sue Gray that Boris Johnson was saying could not be relied on because she might have taken a job with Keir Starmer,

but because the committee's report has been so much harsher than her report.

He's saying Sue Gray and praying her in aid to help him get out of trouble.

We're seeing exactly the same thing in Prime Minister's questions.

Starmer made a quip about his getting a fine and he said, oh, well, Sue Gray exonerated me.

She said that I didn't know it was going to be an event, but by the way, I don't really trust anything about that because, you know, she's going to advise you.

This inquiry is staying away from Sue Gray.

They have put a block between the Sue Gray report and what they're doing now precisely because they do not want to incite accusations of partisanship.

Well, and they can get even better evidence.

You know, we should never forget Sue Gray was a civil servant doing what was in essence a quite informal inquiry in some ways.

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This is a full, fully fledged parliamentary inquiry into whether or not the Prime Minister committed contempt and misled the House.

They can get whatever they want and they have got all sorts of evidence from people who worked in number 10, from people who were around, Simon Case, the Cabinet Secretary and down.

So it's comprehensive.

And a lot of those lines that we are now familiar with have come up in this second half of the inquiry, particularly the ones that Boris Johnson is now saying he doesn't remember saying.

Bernard Jenkins asked him if he remarked that it was the most un-socially-distance gathering in the UK.

I think the word was probably.

And that was put to him straight away.

And Boris Johnson has now said, I don't remember, but it seems unlikely.

But I did make other observations about social distancing that I sort of do remember, just not those.

The purpose of this inquiry is not to reopen so-called party gate.

It is to discover whether or not I lied to Parliament, wittingly misled colleagues and the country about what I knew and believed about those gatherings when I said that the rules and the guidance...

This committee hearing started at 2 o'clock.

And three hours in, you start to hear how irascible and, quite frankly, grumpy and frustrated Boris Johnson is getting.

Sorry.

The answer is, quite simply, that over the...

I tried to describe what I felt about these events as they were happening.

Nobody raised with me or had any concern before I stood up on December 1st about those events.

You did not ask.

I asked... I did...

This is complete nonsense.

I mean, complete nonsense.

I asked the relevant people.

They were senior people.

They'd been working very hard.

Jack Dahl gave me a clear account of what had happened.

How was the Cabinet Secretary?

How was the Cabinet Secretary wasn't there?

Sorry, you're wrong, because I did ask the Cabinet Secretary.

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I did ask the Cabinet Secretary to conduct an inquiry on the 7th of December.
Not about whether you were undertaking so the House of Commons were correct.
Of course, that was what he was...
I think we can move on.
And he keeps returning to this defence, which has nobody told me.
And I think that's having the adverse impact that he thinks it is, because he sounds weak.
He keeps on saying he wasn't advised any rules have been broken.
He had a constant emphasis that wasn't what he'd been told.
Just think for a moment how weak that argument is.
He made the rules.
He extolled the rules.
He publicised the rules.
Now, he's telling us he didn't have the judgement to decide for himself if he and others in Downing Street were following those same rules.
I think that clip is actually really revealing for where this is all going, because what you could see there, you're just simply seeing disbelief from members of Parliament, from the different committee members, that this version of events where the Prime Minister had been in such a different frame of mind to the rest of the country about his own guidance, that is what this will all come down to, the incredulity of those MPs.
Well, there's another degree of incredulity I have over, having listened to the evidence being given over the past couple of hours, that obviously Boris Johnson's argument is that these parties were essential work events because I had to thank the hard-working staff. They had put in so many hours, etc., etc.
So this is me being a leader of my team.
At the same time as saying that any member of staff who has given evidence to your committee that has in any way contradicted me, he has thrown them under the bus with alacrity and without a second's hesitation.
So Jack Doyle, who was the press secretary...
He's not having a great afternoon, Jack, is he?

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No. Well, Jack is absolutely being...
Boris has run the bus over him
and then put the bus into reverse and reverse back over him.
But I don't think that matters,
because Jack Doyle's statement,
which the committee has and released,
was, I don't think I advised him to say
the rules were followed at all times.
So Jack Doyle has already become part of that small,
but very effective number of advisors,
Simon Case, Martin Reynolds, who've said,
actually, we didn't send him out there equipped with a lie.
He must have chosen that himself.
You know, the thing I keep thinking about watching this today
is that, you know what,
this is one of the main reasons he's no longer Prime Minister.
I don't mean that in the obvious way about the scandal over Partygate.
I keep going back to that fetid weird period
when, you know, the letters were going in early summer last year
and something that Conservatory MPs were saying,
even Conservatory MPs who really didn't want to put in that letter,
they were talking about this inquiry.
They knew that this were coming.
Imagine if Johnson were still Prime Minister now.
We would actually have, over this committee,
right now, the stakes feel high as it is
because this could be the end of his career.
This could have led to the actual destruction of a sitting Prime Minister.
That would be the instability currently hanging over,
not just the Conservative Party and the Cabinet
and the government and the country.
And for all of those people who say this was this big witch hunt
to get rid of Boris Johnson from office,
they couldn't forgive him for Brexit,
it was an elite establishment, whatever, no.
This was a huge factor in lots of Conservative MPs at the time,
just thinking Partygate is never going to end
and we can't have its resolution come, which is this,
not the Met, not Sue Gray, but this,
have that come when Johnson is still an incumbent PM.
Well, actually, it's not just Partygate,
it goes back to that central issue of trust and truth
because when the party finally rebelled against the Prime Minister,
it was over his lie about Chris Pinscher.

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He pretended that he knew nothing about Chris Pinscher's former record of allegations of sexual abuse.

Once again, it's the instability of having somebody at your helm that you basically don't trust.

And I'm really fascinated to see how many MPs, because there is a free vote now, they are not being whipped.

Rishi Sunak has been completely hands off, as he would be in this kind of non-party scenario.

How many MPs will follow Boris Johnson out the door?

Because I think it also takes us to another narrative, another story happening today, which is when we heard this bell.

And it must have been obvious to others in the building, including the current Prime Minister.

Order, order, we will now suspend the sitting whilst the House of Commons votes and we will reconvene in 15 minutes.

Thank you.

And that's a division bell, which means that MPs have to go and vote and Harriet Harman had to suspend the sitting to allow MPs to go and vote.

And Boris Johnson scuttled downstairs from the committee corridor into the division lobbies to vote against the government.

And again, going back to Lewis's point of the power shift and fading power, Boris Johnson was leading a rebellion against the Windsor framework, saying it was not satisfactory and there weren't enough guarantees and that Rishi Sunak needed to be more belligerent, with the result that a total of 29 Tories, members of the DUP, voted against the Windsor framework.

But it was overwhelmingly carried because...

29, we should say, is nothing. It is tiny.

Majority of 486.

So there you have Boris Johnson and Liz Truss voting against it.

Two Prime Ministers leading the charge against the current Prime Minister and all they could muster was this ragtag little army, 29 people, to vote against it.

I think Rishi Sunak would have seen the numbers for that vote and would have been high-fiving his staff.

Yeah, I think it's interesting that even Jeffrey Donaldson, even the leader of the DUP,

is not questioning Rishi Sunak's motivation in trying to make improvements.

Nobody is sticking up for the old version of Boris Johnson's protocol.

They are literally voting in favour of ripping up the bit of the Brexit mess in Northern Ireland that he left his party with.

Even Jeffrey Donaldson is not questioning the motivation.

He's just saying, yeah, we've got to get it right.

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Maybe he wants more concessions. Maybe he wants something else.

But 29 is nothing.

Rishi Sunak has got this bill through with the support of Labour, the opposition, which is not the strongest look, but actually he has got so few rebels now.

The ERG, that great force of sort of insurgent that used to be so dominant in the Tory party, now looks pretty flaky.

Even Steve Baker, the man we used to call Brexit Hardman for some really weird over-match show reason, said this.

So really both of them should be backing the Windsor framework today.

And what I would say is they're both better than this.

We've reached this point thanks to Liz Truss setting the process in train.

And today's measures are better, of course, than the protocol that Boris Johnson put in place, a protocol which he spoke about and those things he said turned out not to be accurate.

So, you know, he's got a choice.

He can be remembered for the great acts of statecraft that he achieved, or he can risk looking like a pound-shot Nigel Farage.

I hope he chooses to be remembered as a statesman.

I suppose we should say it doesn't mean that overwhelming victory doesn't mean that the politics around the framework are stable.

There were lots of Tory MPs who did abstain.

This was just about one element of the framework, the storm break.

But it does show, I think John's absolutely right,

it does show the shifting tectonic plates within the Conservative Party.

And these two things aren't unrelated, right?

Again, the fact that Johnson is so implicated in this,

the fact that he is being so damaged by this event even taking place, just makes it so much harder to try and corral any real sort of resistance to the Sunak premiership,

plan and plot any kind of re-entry point a moment to destabilise him,

because again, this is just hanging all over it.

The other thing from Rishi Sunak's point of view

is that his fingerprints aren't anywhere near any of this.

Although Johnson keeps mentioning him as many times as he possibly can.

Yeah, but the privileges committee is just a committee of the House.

Rishi Sunak's not implicated.

He's saying MPs should have a free vote on it.

He's not trying to whip his MPs in one direction or the other.

He's standing back and realising that this is the moment, probably, when you say, if there was a tipping point where Boris Johnson ceased to be a figure of importance in British politics.

Now, look, you know, you never count Boris Johnson out just like you never count Donald Trump out.

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But it looks like this kind of feels like the end of the road for Boris Johnson.
He may carry on in Parliament for longer.
He may not get recalled.
Who knows what is going to happen at the end of this process.
But it does seem like Rishi Sunak is having a marvellous day.
I don't know whether you boys have noticed it,
but I always hear it when...
Boy, I love it.
You little boys.
When Boris Johnson says that he accepts total responsibility for something,
he always says that in the House, but he never actually does.
And I keep returning to that early school report
written by his Eaton Housemaster,
which describes Johnson as being free of the network of obligation
that binds everyone else.
If there is a bus and you work for him or close to him,
you'll probably be under it.
If there are rules, you'll probably be following them.
He won't.
If there is an excuse, he'll be confusing you, tying you in knots.
There will be bluster, but he'll think that none of that applies to him.
And it's something that has sort of stayed with him in his life,
like the stick of rock that whatever everyone else is thinking they have to do,
he's not obliged to do that.
I think it's well, though.
The other thing I keep thinking is,
it goes back to what we were saying a little bit earlier.
If Downing Street had approached this scandal and these set of stories
differently from the beginning,
I remain convinced that perhaps Boris Johnson,
maybe he would have lost the premiership,
but he certainly wouldn't be where he is now.
Because if they had said, from a much earlier point,
we've looked into this and I think actually, yes,
there were events that it appears they could have at least broken the guidance.
He would never have gone to the House of Commons and made these assurances.
He could have just stuck to that line.
It was their mendacity and the dishonesty from the beginning.
Emily, you and I had experience of this at the time
and we heard stories about various things from different people
that may or may not have happened.
We go to Downing Street about it.
We get point blank denials from some of the people involved
who we now know completely knew what was going on.

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There was James Bible.
And while on the King James Bible no less,
there was the way, and in a way this is Boris Johnson's personality
catching up with him, because if this had been handled
in a different way from the beginning,
as I say, maybe the politics would have got out of control
because of the public and that maybe Johnson
would have ended up leaving office,
but he certainly wouldn't be on contempt of parliament charges right now.
Of course, we might be hearing something
that the rest of the committee is not hearing.
This story could take a whole different turn
and it could be that when the rest of the MPs
go to the House and vote,
they actually think he made a pretty good case for himself
and he has sought to establish
why it was so important for him to attend these work rapid gatherings
or the rest of it.
There is a chance that they will not vote
that he has misled parliament
and they will not remove him
and there will not be a by-election,
but one little fact which might tell us about Boris Johnson's frame of mind,
I understand he has just bought a house in Oxfordshire
within the constituency of Henley, which he knows well.
So there is a plan B somewhere in place.
There's always a plan B.
The interesting question would be to go to the people who voted
on a conservative home poll yesterday
where they came out and said,
look, we don't think Boris has lied.
We think he's fundamentally honest.
We don't understand what this is all about.
This is all something about nothing,
but they also said at the same time in this poll,
we don't believe that Boris Johnson should be coming back as Prime Minister.
I wonder whether any of the people listening today
who think he's fundamentally honest,
I suspect we'll still think he's fundamentally...
Has anyone changed their mind?
Has anyone changed their mind?
We'll be back in a moment.
Welcome back.
Just worth going through what happens when the committee ends its hearing

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later today.

One is it could still call Boris Johnson back to give more evidence.

Secondly, it's unlikely that there will be a recommendation of vote by the committee for some weeks to come.

Certainly not this side of Easter.

Don't expect that there's going to be a swift resolution of this tonight.

And thirdly, whatever the recommendation is, it has to be voted on by the House of Commons.

If the House of Commons recommends that he should be expelled from the Commons for more than 10 days, then, fourthly, that could trigger a recall petition in his constituency, which could lead to him, you know, a by-election there.

Have I missed anything else?

No, that's completely...

I was talking to...

In Parliament, I was talking to MP just in terms of thinking about, like, how the committee may see this.

And they were saying, look, having spoken to quite a few people on there, and obviously they're being very confidential about their deliberations, but their impression was that something that they will at least be weighing up, and if not that they should be, is this goes beyond just Boris Johnson.

Their conclusions about this goes beyond Boris Johnson, in the sense that what is at stake here in the most vivid way possible is that fundamental rule of our parliamentary democracy and our constitution.

You know, we have an unwritten constitution, but there is one sort of really, really big rule in terms of how Parliament works, which is you don't mislead Parliament.

And if in these circumstances they were saying, the committee came back and said, well, you know, there are big question marks, but we can't be exactly sure what was in Boris Johnson's head, then what you would essentially be saying, and this is basically Johnson's argument, is that you can never really prove beyond reasonable doubt

that someone has mislead Parliament unless there is an email or a document which says, I, Boris Johnson, am going to go and mislead Parliament later today,

because there is such a wealth of evidence stacked against him

that if they don't in some way recognise that,

then it leaves that core principle of our democracy

that you don't mislead Parliament under any circumstances or knowingly do so,

and you must correct the record as early as possible in tatters.

Yeah, and I think it's about the integrity of all their jobs.

So you will hear Tory MPs and Labour MPs all say,

we cannot afford to fall lower in the public's estimation

because of this accusation of lying.

So I think that is fundamental.

It's also interesting, if we end where we started with the King James Bible,

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it is, I'm being told by Hannah White of the Institute of Government, unusual, very unusual to find somebody swearing an oath at the beginning, but it's not unheard of, and she thinks it's to do with the fact they've gone to great lengths not to rely on Sue Gray's evidence because of all the reasons we talked about, and they've sworn versions of statements, so they are applying the same standards to oral evidence.

That is why the stakes are so high here, and when you said he would deny if he could, he can't deny those phrases, most probably, because he does know he's taken an oath, and it is an oath that could leave to perjury if it's broken. Before we go, just worth reflecting on a couple of other things that have been happening today, which of course have been absolutely squeezed out by the whole sort of Johnson theatre show that we've all been watching.

The inflation figures, worse.

Inflation going up, not coming down, although I noticed that Rishi Sunak saying in the comments, you know, we're going to halve inflation, not failing to mention that the latest figures that came out that morning had gone up. Only country in the G7 now in double digits over 10%.

No one expected it.

Economists did not expect that, and it's rattled by it.

Taxes, Rishi Sunak's tax return just landed.

I wonder why they chose today to publish his tax returns, which showed that he made £1.9 million in the last tax year.

Now, a tenth of that came from his work as an MP, as Prime Minister, so, you know, a government employee.

An additional £172,000 came in dividends,

and £1.6 million in capital gains,

because either he must have sold a whole pile of shares or he sold a property we don't know what.

But that is what the tax return shows.

So, Rishi Sunak taking in £1.9 million,

which I've calculated on the back of an envelope as being roughly 60 times the average national wage in the UK has just landed.

Yeah, the day job, as PM,

is just one-tenth of what you're actually taking home.

Good day to very bad news.

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Someone once said.
As someone once said over something else.
We would never be that cynical.
Of course, on the news agency.
No, no, no.
We're always good news here.
Famously.
Famously upbeat.
We'll be back tomorrow.
We'll be trying to assess the fallout.
And I think Mr Lewis Goodall will be in Paris,
where there is a bit of rioting on the streets.
Well, yeah, exactly.
So it's a tough job, but someone's got to do it.
The city of love and things like that.
The city of love and rubbish on the streets.
Got to love Paris in the springtime.
Have fun.
See you tomorrow. Bye for now.
This has been a Global Player original podcast
and a Persephoneka production.