



Was Pontius Pilate forgiven for putting Jesus to death? (i.e. Did God forgive him?)

That's a very good question that came from a student in confirmation class.

Jesus (speaking of the soldiers who were crucifying him) said from the cross, "Father, forgive them for they don't know what they're doing." Did this include Pilate? Does it include you?

Jesus gave a similar message to Pontius Pilate while Pilate was trying to decide what to do with Jesus. (Pilate knew Jesus was innocent, but he feared for his job - and maybe his life. If the Jews who wanted Jesus killed would go to his supervisor and claim that Pilate had not punished someone who claimed to be king, Pilate could be guilty of freeing someone who could be guilty of "treason" against the emperor).

When Pilate said, *"Don't you realize I have the power to either free you or crucify you?"* Jesus answered, *"You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."* From then on Pilate tried to set Jesus free.

Jesus lets Pilate know that he did not hold him accountable for his death. But is Pilate forgiven?

The importance of this question is found when we look at *our own* lives and realize that many times, *just like Pilate*, we have known what was right but didn't do it out of fear of what others may think or do. Some of those times may have even involved choosing not to 'stand up for Jesus' when we knew we should. We are no different than Pilate. So, are *we* forgiven?

To answer that, we need to know what it means to "forgive." To "forgive" means "to cancel a debt." And whenever someone is wronged, there is a debt owed to that person. Something is needed to "right the wrong." Jesus spoke those words of forgiveness for the benefit of those who were killing him. He wanted them to know that he did not hold what they were doing against them. He gave witness to the very thing that he was doing by hanging on the cross - forgiving.

We need to remember that there are two parts to forgiveness from God: In order for a specific debt you owe to God (for some 'wrong' you've done) to be cancelled...

Part 1) The wrong must be righted. Forgiveness given by the party that was wronged.

Part 2) The party who did the wrong must admit that he owes a debt and needs it forgiven.

Jesus accomplished Part 1 for *everyone* who ever will live when he died on the cross - taking our place in taking the punishment to "right our wrongs." (See "I took your place" elsewhere in this newsletter.)

But Part 2 must happen in order for individuals (like Pilate and you and me) to personally benefit from the forgiveness Jesus gives. And Part 2 only happens when individuals repent of their sin and believe that Jesus has indeed righted their wrongs.

Some of the things the Bible tells us lead me to believe that Pilate had to have been at least tempted to believe in Jesus. Like the fact that Pilate's wife had a dream about Jesus and warned him to not sentence

him; the fact that Pilate was afraid when he heard that Jesus claimed to be the son of God; and the fact that Pilate wrote "King of the Jews" above Jesus' cross. Much has been speculated about whether Pilate did come to trust in Jesus after the Resurrection. But we really don't know.

The key is to answer the question for yourself. You know Jesus has taken care of Part 1. His Resurrection from the dead was proof that God the Father accepted his sacrifice as full payment to "right your wrongs." So the only question that remains to be answered is: Has "Part 2" happened for you? If it hasn't and you'd like it to happen but aren't sure how - please give me a call.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net