

## **FATHER, FORGIVE THEM!** **Forgive Us When We Abandon Your Truths!**

**(Pontius Pilate)**  
**John 18:33-38**

The conversation between Pontius Pilate and Jesus is recorded in John 18:33-38.

*<sup>33</sup>Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” <sup>34</sup>“Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”*

*<sup>35</sup>“Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”*

*<sup>36</sup>Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”*

*<sup>37</sup>“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.” <sup>38</sup>“What is truth?” Pilate asked.*

*With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.*

Dear friends in Christ,

The Romans prided themselves on their eloquence. They thought of themselves as the greatest speakers, the greatest orators, that the world had ever seen. Anyone who hoped for success and fame studied the arts of rhetoric and public speaking with single-minded passion. The proper turning of a phrase, the astute laying out of an argument, the flourish with which a speech was brought to a successful conclusion—the Romans of old gained great satisfaction with such things.

How ironic then that in the long ages since the days of their empire’s power, the most famous thing ever said by any Roman is only three words long! The orations of Cicero and Caesar are long forgotten, but the words of Pontius Pilate live on. “What is truth?”

On its face, it’s a dumb question, isn’t it? Truth is what’s true. Truth is what’s real. The sun rises in the east and sets in the west; that’s a truth. Two plus two equals four; that’s a truth. Truth is just plain objective fact. You can accept it or not, but that is not going to change a truth. You can close your eyes to it, as Pilate did, but that won’t make it go away.

We Christians like to think of ourselves as being on the side of the truth, as Jesus put it. We want to be counted as those who stand up for the truth of God’s Word. The trouble comes when you realize that there are an awful lot of truths in the Bible, and they aren’t always that easy to stand up for. Perhaps as I read the text you found yourself shaking your head at Pilate’s words. But how often don’t we, even without thinking about, begin to adopt his philosophy? And when we do, that is when we must pray:

**Forgive Us When We Abandon Your Truths!**

## 1. We sometimes think they don't fit into our lives.

There are times when people feel that the things God has to say don't really fit into their lives. Pontius Pilate found himself in just such a situation on the morning of that Friday so long ago. Consider how things looked from Pilate's perspective. He hardly had the time or the inclination to get mixed up in a Jewish religious debate. There were so many debates among the Jews as it was. The Pharisees disagreed with the Sadducees; the Herodians disagreed with the Essenes; this rabbi disagreed with that rabbi. Every moment of every day could have been taken up with trying to decide between all the different theological opinions in the religion-soaked land of Israel.

It was Pilate's job to do something more important than to worry about Jewish religious disagreements. He had to govern a rebellious province. The Jews were some of the unhappiest members of the Roman Empire, and they let every Roman within earshot know it. In the past, governing them had been difficult and more than a few times Pilate's superiors in Rome had raked him over the coals for allowing matters to get out of hand. "Mistakes had been made," as the politician puts it, and Pilate's resumé wasn't looking particularly healthy.

The empire wanted order, and any governor who could not guarantee order would soon be looking for another job. And then one morning, into all of this walked Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews. If this man really thought he was a king, then Pilate would have to deal with it, of course. But a short interrogation proved that there was no political rebellion in this man's mind. Therefore, he was of no concern, and Pilate felt free to dismiss him as yet another blathering prophet in a land filled with religious blatherers.

*"My kingdom is not of this world,"* Jesus said. *"Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."* But Pontius Pilate had no time to side with anyone's "truth." There were so many truly important matters he had to attend to, and this King of truth was merely a distraction to him. Truth! Who had the time for that? *"What is truth?"* he asked and dismissed the whole discussion from his mind. There was no time for something as inconvenient as truth.

In a similar way, we sometimes find it inconvenient to try to fit God's truths into our lives. People's lives, after all, are filled with all kinds of important matters, aren't they? It's a lot of work just to make a living, or to go to school, or to keep up the house. Do those of you who are my age or older remember, when all this inventing and technology really began developing a couple decades ago, the scientists and engineers kept telling us how this would make life easier? Does life seem any easier to you? Or has it become an almost nonstop struggle to keep your head above water?

And there are times when God's eternal truths just seem to have no use or meaning. It's nearly impossible to make time for daily family devotions when everyone in the family seems to be going in 20 different directions every minute of the day. It's difficult to set aside time for reading your Bible when you have to rush from place to place and hardly have time to do everything that

has to be done each day. Daily prayer is a fine idea; but when are you going to find the time?

And then come those times when, as with Pilate, God's truths could get in the way of what you feel is important. The truths of his commandments, how often don't they seem to get in the way? Forbidding the things you feel you need to do or want to do, and commanding the things you feel you don't have time to attend to or just don't want to get involved in. Even the truth of his gospel can intrude when the needs of your soul don't seem all that important next to the needs of the moment.

Salvation in Christ, heaven itself, can seem like a pie-in-the-sky proposition when the bills are piling up or the homework is piling up or you're out of work and can't find a job. And it is then that while you may not use the words of Pilate, his thought is there. What is the use of this "truth" to me? It's not useful where I really need help. It's all nice and wonderful, but what does it have to do with the price of a gallon of gas or a loaf of bread? After a while, even coming to church can seem like a waste of your time because it doesn't seem to accomplish anything that you need to have happen in your earthly life. Truth? What is truth?

There is a term to describe this way of looking at your life. It's called tunnel vision, and Pontius Pilate had it bad. Your focus narrows so much that you can't even see that there are other important things you ought to be dealing with. Some of them may turn out to be much more important than what you thought was of the highest significance. Pilate couldn't see past the business of being governor. But we have to learn to see a wider scope than just the affairs of this earthly life. Instead of trying to get God's truths to conform to our lives, we need to pray, "Father, fit our lives to your eternal truths."

## **2. Father, fit our lives to your eternal truths.**

Look at these matters from God's perspective, an eternal and spiritual perspective. Yes, there is a lot to do in this life, and it's important that you perform your duties in this world. You have to pay the bills and do the homework and keep up the house and plan for the future and all the rest. No one is denying that. But widen your view. You're only going to be here for a short time. All eternity lies before you after that, and that is the truth on which your Creator and Savior wants you to focus your greatest attention.

Pilate had no idea how matters of eternal importance were impinging upon his little world of self-importance that day. There, in his courtroom, was being played out the drama of the ages, the culmination of the centuries-old battle between the seething hatred of the devil and the passionate, saving love of God. And no less than the Son of God, the promised Savior of the world, was inviting this man to come in on the side of God's truth, to rise above the pettiness and the commonplace affairs of the world around him and see the salvation of the Lord. It's almost maddening to think how close Pilate was to it. The divine hand was there, reaching out to him, straining to him, and Pilate casually knocked it away and went on with his everyday affairs.

Can anybody here actually imagine that your everyday concerns should trump God's eternal concerns for you and for others? Remember the words of Christ: "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?*" (Mt 16:26). You could spend all your time and energy on the things of this world and achieve the greatest success. But on the day of your death, what good will it all have been? You'll get a big funeral, probably, and your survivors will be able to afford a really nice gravestone for you. What is the good of that if you have missed out on the joys of heaven?

And particularly remember the **saving truth** that Jesus came to proclaim and to bring into being. The **old truth** was that the wages of sin was death for us. But the **new truth** is that the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord. The **new truth** is that there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. The **supremely important truth** is that "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (Jn 3:16).

The **truth** is that he died to redeem you from sin and from what St. Peter called "*the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers*" (1 Pe 1:18). It's easy to think of that phrase as referring to the idolatrous religions of your far-off ancestors. But there's more to it. You have been saved from living life only for this world. You have been given the **truth** that your journey through this world is just that, a journey, and your true destination is the one that Jesus Christ gave his life to win for you.

The **truth** is that your treasures are not stored up here on earth but in heaven. Yes, you still have to deal with the things of this world, but not as ends in themselves. All that you do—whether you eat or drink or whatever you do—you now do for the glory of God and his truth. You are now to present yourself as a living sacrifice to him, doing all you can to spread the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, especially to those who do not yet know him.

In the light of that **saving truth**, pray for God to make the importance of his truths the foundation on which you build your life. Pray that you might value God's truth as your greatest treasure. Pray that you do all you can to make it the greatest treasure of those around you as well.

"*What is truth?*" Pilate asked. And then he didn't stay around for an answer. Turning his back on the words that could have saved his soul, Pilate got on with the "more important" work of the day.

Let us pray:

Lord God, heavenly Father, forgive us when we fall into Pilate's error. Let us fervently seek out your truths in your Holy Word, and let us subordinate everything in our lives to your eternal truth. As your dear Son prayed for us, so now we pray for ourselves: "Sanctify us through the truth; your Word is truth. Amen."

