QUESTIONS PILATE ASKED
John 8:33-38

3. "What Have You Done?"
Mark 8:31-9:1

"What have you done?" Pilate asked Jesus. It's a question of presumed guilt. That's the way it was and often is, in spite of our creeds to the contrary. One is presumed guilty until proven otherwise. With all the uproar among the Jews, Jesus must have done something. No lawyer is there whispering in his ear that he has the right to remain silent.

"Jesus, what *have* you done?" It's not a question we're likely to ask. Quite the contrary. We are quick to promote his innocence. He didn't do anything! We might even say he is the innocent pawn in the divine scheme of things. Knowing what we know about Jesus, it's hard to read Isaiah 53 any other way: **"Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."**[1]

Did we not hear Jesus tell his disciples that it would be this way? **"The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."**[2]

If we want to keep ourselves a safe distance away from this story, that's the best way to read it. Jesus didn't do anything. He simply plays the leading role in God's drama of salvation that is acted out on the great cosmic stage. Jesus is only the innocent lamb that is sacrificed on the altar of God for reasons we do not understand but will accept, because theat's the way God wrote the script! But if we dare to get close enough to the story to see the human dynamic, to see even something of ourselves, then we'll want to ask the question. **"Jesus, what *have* you done?"**

We could sum up his "guilt" rather easily – he loved God and neighbor. That's puzzling because loving God and others are things we value very much. We teach it to our children and our grandchildren. So how can loving God and neighbor – something we value so much – get anyone into trouble? Surely Jesus did something more than that!

The Affirmation of Faith that is printed in the bulletin and which we will read in a few moments says that "Jesus' complete obedience led him into conflict with his people."[3] *Complete* obedience – that's where the rub comes in. Think about it. It is a lot less troubling to love God a little rather than to love God a lot! You can get too radical about this "God business," you know! Have we forgotten how radical Jesus was and what he was like?

His peaching in his hometown synagogue was such that the people ran him out of town.[4] People were continually amazed at what he said in synagogues[5] and the Temple.[6] He broke the sabbath law[7] and he didn't always seem to be in his right mind.[8] He associated with "the wrong kind of people"[9] and had a reputation of going to too many parties.[10] Many of the things he said sounded sacrilegious,[11] unpatriotic,[12] blasphemous,[13] and sometimes he made no sense at all, so cryptic was

the message behind his words.[14]

What did Jesus do? When you watch the things he did and carefully listen to the things he said, it becomes apparent that he called into question the people's sense of goodness.

Remember the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Luke introduces it by saying **"Jesus also told this parable to people who were sure of their own goodness and despised everybody else."**[15]

The Pharisee was a pillar of church and society. "I am not greedy, dishonest, or an adulterer .. I fast two days a week and give God one tenth of all my income." The Tax Collector, because of the Roman system, was most likely a crook as well as an agent of the state. But, the story goes, the Tax Collector, and not the Pharisee, was in the right with God when he went home.

"A certain ruler asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?'"[16] **"Why do you call me good?"** Jesus responded. **"No one is good except God alone!"** We don't want to argue with that statement. After all, it's in the Bible! And it does make sense. But what does it mean to say that no one is good except God alone. It means that certain ruler isn't good. It means you aren't good. It means I'm not good. "O, but we keep all the commandments, we always come to church. We don't cheat on our income tax. We keep up our property." "Not good enough," Jesus tells us!

"Sell everything you have and give the money to the poor." Would that be good enough? I doubt it. Jesus is so hard on our goodness because we trust it so much. He wants us to trust God alone. Besides, our goodness isn't all that good.

Jesus shines brighter,
Jesus shines purer,
Than all the angels
Heaven can boast.[17]

In such pure light, "all human virtue ... is found to be infected by self-interest and hostility."[18] I love the beach, but my light-sensitive eyes cannot tolerate bright sunshine unless I wear dark glasses and a cap to protect them. Our light-sensitive lives cannot tolerate the purity of such a genuinely human person as Jesus. Next to him we don't look very good. Is it any wonder that people tried to get rid of him?

"Jesus, what *have* you done?" He also called into question the people's religious aspirations. What is the primary self-interest that infects our goodness? We try to be good so that we will be loved – loved by God and loved by others. We try to be good so that we will be rewarded both in this life and in the life to come.

Jesus said it doesn't work that way. First of all, good things don't necessarily happen to good people nor do bad things necessarily happen to bad people. **"God makes his sun to shine on bad and good people alike, and gives rain to those who do good and to those who do evil."**[19] He taught that but most people don't believe it. Listen to the way some rant and rave, whine and wail, when some misfortune comes their way.

Nor is our goodness a ticket into the kingdom of God. Who among us doesn't wince a little when he tells us, **"The tax collectors and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before us."**[20] Whether we work for God in the heat of the day all day long, or only sign on at the 11th hour, the wages are just the same![21]

Jesus tells us in as many ways as he possibly can that God doesn't love us because we are good. God doesn't love us because we've come to worship today. God doesn't love us because we give x-number of dollars in the offering plate (though when we're trying to raise the church budget I wish I could tell you differently). God doesn't love you because you try to keep the commandments. God doesn't love you because you are honest, hard-working, lovable people. God loves you because you are you! God loves you because it is God's nature to love. **'This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us ..."**[22]

That's the incredibly good news of the gospel if you don't believe you have much to offer God in terms of faith and obedience. But it can be bad news if you think you have much to offer God in every way in terms of faith and obedience. That "God-loves-us-*first*" kind of talk undermines a lot of the assumptions that religious people often have. Is it any wonder that people tried to get rid of him?

"Jesus, what *have* you done?" He also called into question the people's national hopes. He didn't counsel them to take up arms to overthrow their national enemy. Nor has he ever. Nor does he now.

One of the reasons people were so upset with his preaching in his hometown synagogue was the way he illustrated his sermon. He told how Elijah and Elisha mediated the healing grace of God to people that were outside the faith community in the pagan lands of Sidon and Syria.[23] His point was all too clear for their narrow, nationalistic way of thinking – "the love of God is broader than the measure of human minds."[24]

In one of his more familiar parables, the good guy is none other than a Samaritan. The Samaritans may have been more despised than the Romans because they were once people from the faith community who had gone astray.

National hopes are not necessarily evil unless they try to make God into a tribal deity and use God for any one nation's narrow purposes. Jesus refused to be used by those who saw salvation only in terms of freedom from Roman oppression, or by those who limited God's love their own citizens alone. Nor can Jesus be used today as the banner for any one nation in its fight against another nation. Is it any wonder that people tried to get rid of him?

"Jesus, what *have* you done?" The more we ask it, the more we begin to wonder who's on trial here – Jesus or Pilate or us! The question is more accurately stated this way – "Lord Jesus Christ, what have *we* done?" The choir had it absolutely right:

Who was the guilty?
Who brought this upon You?
It is my treason, Lord, that has undone You.
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied You;
I crucified You.[25]

1. Isaiah 53:4-6

2. Mark 8:31

3. *Confession of 1967*, Book of Confessions, 9.08 – *We believe that in Jesus of Nazareth, true humanity was realized once for all Jesus, a Palestinian Jew, lived among his own people and shared their needs, temptations, joys and sorrows. He expressed the love of God in word and deed and became a brother to all kinds of sinful people. But his complete obedience led him into conflict with his people. His life and teaching judged their goodness, religious aspirations, and national hopes. Many rejected him and demanded his death. In giving himself freely for them he took upon himself the judgment under which all stand convicted. God raised him from the dead, vindicating him as Messiah and Lord. The victim of sin became victor, and won the victory over sin and death for us all.*

4. Luke 4:14

5. Mark 1:11

6. John 2:19

7. Mark 2:22-3:6

8. Mark 3:21

9. Luke 15:2

10. Matthew 11:19

11. Luke 7:48

12. Matthew 22:17

13. Mark 14:62

14. See Matthew 13

15. Luke 18:9, *Good News Bible*

16. Luke 18:18

17. From the hymn, *Fairest Lord Jesus*, 1677

18. *Confession of 1967,* Book of Confessions, 9.13

19. Matthew 5:45

20. Matthew 21:31

21. Matthew 20:1 and following

22. 1 John 4:10

23. See Luke 4:16-30

24. From the hymn, *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy*, by Frederick William Faber, 1854

25. The choir's anthem was based on the hymn, *Ah, Holy Jesus* by Johann Heermann, 1630