



MONDAY MANNA

February 9, 2015

THE MAN WHO REFUSED A PARDON

Imagine being convicted of a crime you deeply regretted – intentional or unintentional – and being offered a pardon to absolve you of any penalty. Would you accept it? Let me tell you about a man who did not.

In 1829 two men, George Wilson and James Porter, robbed a United States mail carrier. Both were subsequently captured and tried in a court of law. In May 1830 both men were found guilty of six charges, including robbery of the mail "and putting the life of the driver in jeopardy." Both Wilson and Porter received their sentences: Execution by hanging, to be carried out on July 2.

Porter was executed on schedule, but Wilson was not. Influential friends pleaded for mercy to the President of the United States, Andrew Jackson, on his behalf. President Jackson issued a formal pardon, dropping all charges. Wilson would have to serve only a prison term of 20 years for his other crimes. Incredibly, George Wilson refused the pardon!

An official report stated Wilson chose to "waive and decline any advantage or protection which might be supposed to arise from the pardon...." Wilson also stated he "...had nothing to say, and did not wish in any manner to avail himself in order to avoid sentence...." The U.S. Supreme Court determined, "The court cannot give the prisoner the benefit of the pardon, unless he claims the benefit of it.... It is a grant to him: it is his property; and he may accept it or not as he pleases." Chief Justice John Marshall wrote, "A pardon is an act of grace, proceeding from the power entrusted with the execution of the laws.... (But) delivery is not completed without acceptance.

It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is tendered, and...we have no power in a court to force it on him."

George Wilson committed a crime, was tried and found guilty. He was sentenced for execution, but a presidential decree granted him a full pardon. When he chose to refuse that pardon, he chose to die. Reading this amazing story, we might wonder, "How could anyone refuse a pardon for the death sentence? The man was a fool!" But what if you also are refusing a pardon, one enabling you to spend eternity in the presence of God rather than eternal separation from Him in a place the Bible calls hell?

The Bible plainly teaches we all are sinners, people who have repeatedly broken God's laws. For instance, Romans 3:23 states, "*For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.*" Another verse says, "*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*" (1 John 1:8).

What about the penalty of sin – what are the consequences? We are told, "*For the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). The Old Testament concurs: "*The soul that sins, it shall die*" (Ezekiel 18:4). That does not sound like good news, but God has provided a pardon, one He makes available to us all.

In 2 Peter 3:9 we read, "*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise.... He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*" Later, 1 John 1:9 explains we must accept this pardon: "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*"

If you have not already done so, the question is this: Will you receive or reject the pardon? We each must choose. "*Whoever believes in him is not condemned: but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son*" (John 3:18).

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. What is your first reaction to hearing about someone literally refusing to accept a pardon that would save him from having to face a death sentence?
2. Have you ever done something for which you wish you could have received a pardon, rather than having to face the penalty for your actions? If you feel the freedom to do so, explain a little about those circumstances.
3. Why do you think someone would intentionally refuse a pardon if it were offered? What factors could result in someone doing so?
4. The final portion of this “Monday Manna” asks each reader whether they have chosen to receive the pardon, the free gift of mercy and forgiveness, that God offers for the sins we have committed? Have you accepted His pardon?

If you have a Bible and would like to review some other passages that relate to this topic, consider the following verses: Isaiah 64:6; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:10, 5:8, 8:1; Ephesians 2:8-9; Titus 3:5; 1 John 1:8