

## *Pk's Perspectives ... Receiving Grace*

It is seldom that a person under a sentence of death has refused a pardon. Yet there is one such case on record the annals of the US Supreme Court. Two men named Wilson and Porter had been sentenced to be hanged for robbing the US Mail in 1829. Porter was executed on July 2, 1830. About three weeks before his own execution Wilson was granted a pardon by President Andrew Jackson, but Wilson refused to accept it.

Refusal to accept a pardon was a point of law that had never been raised before, and the Supreme Court was called upon to give a decision. So in January 1833 the Court handed down the following decision, written by Chief Justice John Marshall:

- “A pardon is an act of grace, proceeding from the power entrusted with the execution of the laws, which exempts the individual on whom it is bestowed, from the punishment the law inflicts for a crime he has committed. A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance. It may then be rejected by the person to whom it is rendered; and if it is rejected we have found no power in a court to force it upon him.”

This was a very unusual case, and most people would agree that Wilson was a fool to refuse to accept a pardon.

In his ruling, Justice Marshall stated, “A pardon is an act of grace...” and we understand grace to be the extending of undeserved favor. Grace is unmerited; it is also unearned and cannot be bought. The Chief Justice also made it clear that a pardon/act of grace can only proceed from one with the power to execute laws. Justice Marshall’s decision also states, “A pardon is a deed, to the validity of which delivery is essential, and delivery is not complete without acceptance.” I cannot help but wonder if Justice Marshall was familiar with these verses in Scripture: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23) and “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

This 1833 Supreme Court ruling is a beautiful reflection of what God has accomplished through the life/death/crucifixion/resurrection of Christ. Resulting from Jesus’ willingness to pay the penalty for the sin of humanity, the Righteous Judge offers a full pardon to each and every one of us (John 3:16-17). Christ delivered the “deed of pardon” yet the efficacy of God’s gift of grace is not applied to or experienced by a sinner apart from full acceptance of the pardon that has been offered. Many have left unopened God’s gift of salvation and redemption.

Wilson’s pardon cost only the scratch of President Jackson’s pen; God’s gift of grace required the lifeblood of His one and only Son. Have you accepted God’s gift? I have no idea as to why Wilson chose hanging over President Jackson’s pardon but I’m even more flummoxed by the person who rejects God’s pardon and thereby chooses to bear the full brunt of sin’s eternal penalty in his or her own body.

Cya Sunday morning in Sunday School & Worship (Fellowship Hall), PK.