

Dear brother or sister in Christ,

*The following is an article (slightly edited) I wrote for the June 1, 2002 church newsletter, about three months after Jared's accident. I feel it is right to reprint it now as we face the same situation in our prayers regarding little Patience Fisher to recover from near drowning on June 20, 2009. Like in Jared's case thousands of Christians all over the world are praying for her to recover. Like in Jared's case she continues to languish in an unresponsive state and to depend on medical help to live. You can substitute Patience's name every place where Jared's name appears, except at this point there is no map. It would be best if you read this article with your Bible open to Luke 18.*

In Jared's room there is a map of the world with pins in every country where people are praying for Jared and for us. There are literally thousands of Christians and scores of churches remembering Jared and us before the throne of grace. This is a source of great encouragement but it also raises a very troubling question. What is God doing with all these prayers? We all are asking God to heal Jared and yet there is little improvement. What difference are all these prayers making? This is a huge question that cannot possibly be dealt with exhaustively in this brief letter. However, there is a passage that has been in the back of my mind and that came up in a discussion I had with a couple of guys this week that I want to take a look at.

In Luke 18:1 we are informed that Jesus told his disciples a parable to teach them "they ought always to pray and not lose heart (or give up)." Losing heart in prayer is exactly what we are tempted to do in light of all these prayers and Jared's ongoing condition. The parable Jesus tells is about a widow who has an adversary who is trying to take advantage of her vulnerable position. She goes to a judge that neither fears God nor cares about men. He refuses to help her for a long time. However, she keeps going to him until finally he says that while he does not fear God or care about men he is going to give the woman justice so she doesn't wear him out with her persistent petitions.

In vv. 6-8 Jesus applies the story to our condition. Just as the judge gave justice to the woman so God will give justice to his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night. There are three conditions to the promise to receive justice from God. You must be one of the elect. You must be asking God to give you justice. You must persist in asking him to give you justice. What is this justice that Jesus promises we will be given? In 2 Corinthians 1:20 the apostle Paul says, "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ." Everyone who is in Christ is the recipient of every promise God ever made. God has promised us new hearts that love him. He has promised us the Holy Spirit to cause us to walk in his ways. He has promised that all our diseases will be healed through the wounds of Christ. He has promised us that we will never die but will live and reign with him forever, in resurrected, immortal bodies. He has promised us eternal pleasures at his right hand. He has promised us the comfort of the Holy Spirit now, in our trouble. The list goes on and on.

How many of these promises am I, are you, experiencing in their fullness? NONE. You may have victory over a sin today but the next day you will find yourself in a battle against the same sin or another sin. You may have your financial need met today but you are going to have financial need again. You may have an illness healed today but you are going to have another

one and eventually you will die. You may be comforted today, but you are going to be in distress again and need to be comforted again. In other words, as the elect of God, Christians have a right to perfect holiness and health and freedom from Satan's oppression but no Christian is experiencing it at the present time. This reality is unjust and ought to cause us, like the widow, to petition God day and night to give us justice.

Now Jesus says that when we do this God will "quickly" answer and give us justice. This is where the problem arises. It would appear that either we are not fulfilling the conditions or Jesus' promises are not true. I know that Jesus' promises are true. He cannot lie. It is possible that none of the thousands of people who are praying for Jared are fulfilling the three conditions, but I doubt it. I know many of these people and I know that they are elect and are crying out day and night for God to fulfill his promise to us. So, why is Jared in the same condition? Why has he not been healed? Is there anything in this passage to help us resolve the tension the promise of God will quickly answer and Jared is not healed?

There are three clues in this passage to help us understand how we are to make sense out of this promise and Jared's situation (or any Christian's "trouble"). First, v. 1 begins with the word "then". When did Jesus tell this parable? If you'll look back at 17:20-37 you will see that Jesus tells us to always pray and not give up in the context of talking about his second coming. He makes it clear that there is going to be some length of time before he will come again and save his people. He gives numerous warnings to be alert and not consumed with life in this world. We are to remember Lot's wife who was turned to salt for looking back on Sodom and Gomorrah instead of fleeing to the safety promised by God. While we are waiting for his return we are to be crying out for justice, for God to fulfill all his promises, not being satisfied with or pursuing life in this world.

Second, notice that the last thing Jesus says in v. 8 is a question. He asks, "However, will the Son of Man find faith on the earth when he comes?" In other words, Jesus is wondering if anyone will be persevering in crying out day and night for justice or if everyone will have lost heart and given up, not believing that God will do what he has promised to do. In other words, faith prays persistently for justice.

Finally, the word "quickly" is used in two different ways in the NT. It sometimes means, "immediately" as in Luke 16:6. However, it often means, "soon, at any moment" as in Revelation 1:1 and 22:20. Given the context, it seems to me that this word is primarily pointing ahead to the return of Christ. Jesus is coming again, "at any moment" and when he does he will fulfill all of God's promises completely. Our persistent prayers are one of the means God has appointed to bring Jesus back. Jesus will come as the result of the millions of cries for justice of the millions of Christians who have lived and will live until his coming.

Again, it is important to remember that even if God completely healed Jared today, he will still get sick again and will eventually die. He will never experience "justice" in the full meaning of that word until the return of Christ, when Jesus makes all of God's promises come true. So it is right to pray for Jared's healing based upon God's promise that by the suffering of Christ all our diseases have been healed. Our prayers will be part of the means God uses to give Jared complete healing, either now or at the last day. Our praying must be formed by the promises

God has made to us in Christ. Justice is not whatever we want to have happen. The justice that God is going to give us, in response to our believing, persistent prayer is all of his promises that were purchased for us by the suffering and resurrection of Christ. None of them will be given in their fullness until Christ returns. Therefore, I would encourage all of us, as we pray, to pray back to God the promises he has made to us in Christ. Use the promises of the Bible to form your prayers so that you can be sure that you are asking the just God for the justice he promises.

In the mercy,