

...



My prayer campaign to Jesus wasn't going so well. In fact, it wasn't going anywhere at all. This did not seem fair. After all, it was Jesus himself who said, "Ask, and it shall be given you." I had fulfilled my side of that bargain but had not received even a moment's respite from homosexuality. Again, this did not seem fair. Measured against the Great Commission, I had not done too badly. Teaching all nations was a stretch for a kid who did not even have a driver's license, but I had given my testimony all over middle Tennessee while performing with Just Us. I had led my best friend to Christ. Yet I was still beset with sexual desires that would one day wreck my plans to get married and have quadruplets. All I could think was that I wasn't trying hard enough. That's about all any Christian can

think when his prayers go unanswered. Since all things are possible with God, any fault for unanswered prayers must lie with us. And according to our preachers, if there is a fault, it is always this: lack of faith. If we only have faith, we are taught, God will work miracles in our lives.

This left me in a quandary. How was I to have more faith? I was already sure of God's existence and of his power to remake me in his heterosexual image. What additional faith was possible, then? Having more faith is easy to say in the pulpit but difficult to do in the pew. If you've spent your whole life praying and reading Sunday school lessons and singing hymns and listening to Bible stories and doodling through sermons, there isn't much more Jesus to be had. The stalwart Christian is thus left with little means of increasing his faith beyond praying over and over while repeating to himself, "I believe, I believe, I believe." That was pretty much what Dorothy did to get back to Kansas. But as *The Wizard of Oz* teaches, repeating your prayer while focusing intently on your belief is not enough to guarantee success. You must wear red shoes. The Good Witch must wave her wand. Some magic, some divine intervention, is required.

The only prayer that is always answered is the prayer for forgiveness of sins and salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. After that, the man of faith will spend the rest of his life wondering why his neighbor's prayer was answered while his own was ignored. I had done my share of praying and had noticed that a prayer sent to heaven had about the same effect on the course of my life as a stone thrown into the water has

JUDGMENT DAY

on the course of a river. Prayers for all kinds of improvements were sent up to heaven all around me every day and yet the world went on pretty much as it had always done. I could not help but notice that God seemed to be very picky about which prayers he answered.

Santa Claus was more reliable. Santa could be counted on to bring me most, if not all, of the things I wanted for Christmas, and that seemed to be true for other kids whose fathers were employed. Each year, my parents very thoughtfully helped me to edit my Christmas list so that by December 24, the items on the list were a close match to those piled under the tree the next morning. Disappointments were few. I once asked for a rifle just like the Rifleman's and received a plastic facsimile that could be cocked and fired with one smooth motion of the hand; it was just like Lucas McCain's except that Santa had refrained from loading mine with bullets. Santa's policy seemed to be that any request would be granted, as long as it was not too expensive, would fit under the tree, and would not place my siblings in danger.

God, however, seemed to be running a very different kind of operation that most closely resembled a movie studio. Those studios maintain "slush piles" where unsolicited manuscripts molder until they are eventually read. The odds that an unsolicited manuscript plucked out of the slush pile will be made into a motion picture are slim but are probably better than the odds that God will pluck and answer your prayer out of the millions that are floated up to heaven every minute from every corner of the globe. Given the apparent odds of

receiving an affirmative answer to a prayer, I began to think that, in the absence of ruby slippers or a magic wand, luck might be more important than faith. I had little faith in luck. My hope was fading fast.



Satan was everywhere. Larry bought himself a T-shirt made of a loose-weave netting that reminded me of the nets the gladiators used in the movie *Spartacus*. I knew that a well-raised young man from the artisan class of Christianity such as myself must never wear such a concoction. I had to admit, though, that the shirt showed Larry's physique to great advantage. Once he acquired it, I began to look forward to our motorcycle rides together.

Larry was only fourteen years old when Santa heaved a motorcycle down his chimney. Larry's parents had more sense than Santa and quickly limited the amount of fun Larry could have on the behemoth. The rules for riding were (1) only on weekends, which meant that the motorcycle stayed in his grandparents' garage, just two doors down from our own; (2) only in Hillhurst subdivision and even then, only on the five streets closest to our own; and (3) only up to a certain speed, which was twenty-five miles an hour in front of his grandparents' house and fifty miles an hour as soon as he was out of earshot. None of the other boys in the neighborhood had a motorcycle or particularly wanted one, which meant that if Larry was to have anyone with whom to share his joy,

JUDGMENT DAY

someone must ride with him on the back of his. As far as I know, he never asked anybody but me.

As you might imagine, even at that reckless age, I had little use for speed and no use at all for noise and fumes. I politely declined Larry's first invitation to be squired around the subdivision on his screaming hog, but he would not take no for an answer. I wondered, as I reluctantly climbed aboard, whether I would have an open- or closed-casket funeral, and I praised God's everlasting mercy when an hour later, Larry dropped me off at the top of the driveway, dazed but unharmed. I swore to myself that I would never ride that motorcycle again, but when Larry showed up again the next weekend in his Spartacus shirt, the protests I had rehearsed all week suddenly seemed unsportsmanlike. I did ask if he would be warm enough in that shirt and he said yes. Well, why wouldn't he? He knew perfectly well that I would be clinging to him for dear life. With my arms wrapped tightly around him, the Most Muscular Boy in the School could have ridden naked through Hillhurst subdivision in perfect comfort. That thought did cross my mind, where it was instantly added to the feature-length documentary film of my sins. You will see it with the rest of mankind on Judgment Day.



Satan was everywhere. The documentary film of my mental sins was now so long that it could not be shown without an

THE THOUSAND-PETALED LOTUS

intermission. My prayer campaign to Jesus was not going well at all.



What are homosexuals made of, that we should be impervious to the power of prayer? Stern stuff, it seems. Are homosexuals men of steel? Or something so wispy it cannot be grasped long enough to be changed, like smoke? What did Jesus see when he looked down from heaven at the freckled kid with the unruly hair who begged him for a miracle? Something that he was powerless to change? Or something that he would never want to change, like a sunbeam, like laughter, like clear water?



...