

It was the end of the world. The earth, the moon, the sun, the whole solar system had been obliterated to make room in heaven for the billions of people gathered together for the Last Judgment. No one looked very happy. A few looked pious--They were the ones who had it made, but they wouldn't dare smile, lest they commit the sin of self-pride and lose their place in eternity. Most of the people looked worried, like grade school children on the morning they receive their report cards.

God had already judged a couple billion people and he still had a long way to go. And no one was really bored. No matter how many millions of times the same judgment was passed over and over, it was always interesting to see who went where and what the charges were.

Everything was going according to the divine plan when suddenly there was a scuffle over about where Mars used to be. It was a group of Catholics from Raytown. They were forcing their way up to the front of the crowd. God interrupted the proceedings to ask, "What seems to be the problem?"

"We've heard enough," they said. "There's someone missing from this crowd who should be judged." Now God was quite impressed to think that these people had surveyed the vast throng and found someone gone. God glanced at Michael the Archangel, who fidgeted a little. "Who is missing?" asked God. "Who should be judged?"

The people from Raytown looked God in the eye and said, "You." "On what charges?" asked God. "On not keeping a promise." And with that, they produced a copy of the Gospel according to Luke and pointed to a passage they heard one Sunday in the summer of 1986. "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you." With that sentence they accused God. "How do you plead?" they asked.

God said, "I plead guilty of making the promise, not guilty of breaking it." Then the people produced more evidence, petitions they had made, novenas they had kept, prayer after prayer which got no answer. But God said, "When you pray, there are three possible answers: Yes, no, and wait. Every prayer you prayed did receive one of those answers. I know you didn't like to wait--you stood in lines at the grocery store, you sat at stoplights, you raised children, you grieved losses, and always you wanted a quick solution. But when I promised you an answer, I never promised it'd be fast."

Then God produced a book, not just Luke's Gospel, but the whole Bible. "If you'd looked a little farther," he said, "you would have learned from your ancestors that holiness lies not in getting, but in waiting. Noah waited 40 days and 40 nights for sunshine, the Israelites waited 40 years for the promised land, the sick man waited 38 years by the Pool of Siloam to be healed, Elizabeth waited 50 years before giving birth. Some waited till they died: Moses for the promised land, Job for a straight answer, Jonah for consolation, Jesus for the cup to pass."

The people from Raytown looked at each other and then said, "OK, God, I guess you can judge us now." "I'll be right with you," God replied. "Just stand right over there and wait."

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