

*“...the law had been violated and could not be ignored. Justice demanded punishment.”*

Sometimes justice seems horribly unjust. Confused? Let me explain.

Nearly a year ago, a young man named Jason limped into my life dragging a ball-and-chain of bad choices springing from addictions. Chaos was constant. Though charged with robbery and waiting for the case to wind its way through the court system, he was more concerned about turning his life around. There had to be more to this earth-adventure than what he was experiencing. And there was!

While family and friends watched in awe, God began to transform Jason -- from the inside out; incremental but undeniable. Like a butterfly emerging from a cold cocoon, he began to shake off restrictions and flex a spirit that had been bound for too long. Soul-colors emerged that were vibrant and alive -- a dry sense of humor, an optimistic outlook and a quiet joy in the simple things of life like playing cards with family and working out at the gym.

Dreams surfaced -- of an education, an occupation that helped others. Perhaps his mistakes could be stepping stones upon which they could tread, avoiding all-too-common pitfalls.

Nine months crept by and the dreaded day of judicial reckoning arrived. Entering the courtroom, I glanced at the strapping young miracle beside me and gave silent thanks. “And now”, I thought, “If he could just avoid jail time -- it would be a perfect fairy tale ending to this nightmare.”

It was a wish that resonated in many, including the judge and prosecuting attorney. Both observed the radical change in Jason’s life and expressed optimism regarding his future. But the law had been violated and could not be ignored. Justice demanded punishment. The judge probed prior cases and precedents but at the end of it all declared he had no choice but to sentence my friend to 16 months incarceration.

Faces frowned. Shoulders drooped. Eyes leaked tears.

Freedom became a luxury of the past as Jason shuffled from courtroom to custody. Handcuffs were snapped into place and he was led forth with two criminals who were likewise in court, whisked into a squad car and transported into a cloudy future.

Watching him go, thoughts of another dark day of justice raced through my mind; a bloodied undeserving Savior dragging a cross toward a pain-wracked execution while surrounded by two criminals. Of family members and followers immersed in a slow motion real-life horror unfolding before their red-tinged eyes. How could it be? It wasn’t fair.

But the battered Jesus knew what St. Paul would later reiterate: "...the wages of sin is death." And He, the perfect Lover was well aware of the sinfulness of His beloved human race and the resultant death sentence that hovered over them like a grey cloud. Yes, the beast of justice must be satisfied.

So He staggered toward Calvary, bearing the sin-burden of humanity -- that all who would believe and accept His sacrifice might be delivered from the shadow of death and step into the Promised Land called Freedom.

He serves as a beacon of hope to all who have experienced the seeming injustice of justice, including Jason. Though the future for Jason is now glimpsed through bars -- as St. Paul observed, "through a glass darkly" -- if he will persevere, justice will indeed be satisfied. He will stroll from that prison a free man, free of addictions and free to become all God created him to be.