

Jabez's Prayer

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[0 : 00] Now let us turn together and with the Lord's help, focus for a short while this evening on the passage we read from 1 Chronicles 4.

1 Chronicles 4, and we read again verses 9 and 10. Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. And his mother called his name Jabez, saying, Because I bore him in pain. Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, Oh, that you will bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm, so that it might not bring me pain.

And God granted what he asked. Amen. The previous 12 books of the Bible in the Old Testament, that is from Genesis to 2 Kings, end with the Hebrew nation in captivity.

Despite the number of times the Lord warned them against their idolatry, sending prophets to them and words of warning, they nevertheless persisted in their idolatrous practices.

[1 : 40] And the history is clear enough for us to see that they were on a downward trajectory as the years passed on. And in 2 Kings, at the end of that chapter, we see the nation in captivity.

And the two books of Chronicles, 1 and 2 Chronicles, tell the same story, really, and end at the same point.

However, Chronicles focuses particularly on the reigns of David and Solomon and succeeding kings of Judah.

Not just the whole of Israel, including the 12 tribes, but particularly the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, and the reign of David and his successors on the throne there.

And the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles is given to giving a long genealogy, lists of various people descended from ancestors going back all the way to Adam.

[2 : 54] And in your Bible reading, some people, when they come across a block of chapters like this, with name after name after name, in every chapter, as it were, people tend to just pass over it and go on to some narrative or other that tells something that they recognize more interesting.

But never be fooled by that, because at the very centre of this large list of names, and there must be hundreds of names between 1 Chronicles 1 and the end of the 9th chapter, in the midst of that, we find this jewel regarding one particular man whose name was Jabez.

And I would encourage you to go through each of these chapters that you come across in the Bible with name after name, and the Lord can use even these names and lists of names and genealogies to impress upon you how minutely he knows and cares for his people and his cause.

And we see here that Jabez is mentioned above the others, because all the others up till now, as far as I can read, they have nothing said about them like is said about this man, Jabez.

There are many dozens of names in the previous chapters with just the name of the people mentioned, but nothing said about the people.

[4 : 40] But here we have a difference. And it says that Jabez was more honourable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, because I bore him in pain.

And then in verse 10, Jabez called upon the God of Israel, and so on. So I'd like to focus on what it says about this very special man.

In the midst of all of these names, we have this man mentioned for a particular reason. First of all, I want to say a word or two about his character, because it says here that he was more honourable than his brothers, his character.

What made him more honourable? What does it mean that he was more honourable? Secondly, his focus in life. It says here that in verse 10, he called upon the God of Israel.

That was the focus of his life. And thirdly, his prayer. There are four particular things in his prayer. He asks the Lord to bless him, to extend his borders, that the hand of God would be with him, and that he would keep him from evil.

[6 : 01] These four elements, four matters in his prayer that he prayed to God about. And finally, the answer that the Lord was pleased to give him.

God granted what he asked. And in the original, I realised there's a little word there when it's talking about that God granted what he asked.

The picture I got from the original language was God brought it to him. It's as if God condescended and came down in such a way as to bless this man individually.

Which is, of course, what he does with everyone whom he blesses. He blesses us as individuals. And he brings about certain situations in particular circumstances, in our lives.

He causes us to meet with a particular text of scripture, in a particular place, with a particular emphasis, so that the Lord brings blessing into our heart and lives in a very personal and powerful and glorious way.

[7 : 15] First of all, then, about Jabez. And as far as I can read, nothing is said about Jabez anywhere else in the scripture.

First of all, what does it say about his character? Well, he stands out, as it were, as somebody who was more honourable than his brothers.

More honourable than his brothers. And the meaning of that word, honourable, in the original is that this man was weighty.

This man was of high quality in his lifestyle. This man was a man of substance.

I don't mean substance by way of worldly estates or money, but in his particular character, he was a giant morally and ethically and spiritually.

[8 : 19] He was a man who was honourable. And it says that he was more honourable than his brothers. Well, you find that the word honourable is used elsewhere.

For example, in chapter 11 at verse 21, the same word is used regarding to a man of war by the name of Abishai. 11 and 21, and it says here that he was an honourable man because he was able to do great things with a sword and with a spear in combat against the enemies.

You know what it says? But he was mighty as a man and honourable in the sight of God.

And there's another man mentioned also, Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, chapter 11, verse 25, another man of war, and you can read it yourself the details of what these men did.

They were honourable men. They were men of substance by way of wielding the weapons of war. But this man we have in this particular chapter, chapter 4 at verse 10, 9 and 10, Jabez, we don't find that he used the weapons of war at all.

[9 : 50] He was rather engaged in another kind of warfare, in another kind of lifestyle. He was engaged in a spiritual warfare, which is something that is true concerning every Christian.

Have you ever read what Paul says at the end of his own life, when he looks back over his life, and he says, I have fought a good fight. Among other things, he says, my life has been a fight.

He has been fighting against sin, and the world, and the flesh, and Satan. It has been a fight for him, as it is for every believer, because we're up against all these things, and Paul said, I fought against them.

And that's, I believe, what describes this man, Jabez. He was more honorable than his brother. It's as if he was a man who was steadfast, and unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, because he was a man of great quality, in the presence of God.

He feared God, and kept his commandments. That's why the scripture here says about him that he was more honorable than his brethren.

[11 : 12] But what does it say then about his brethren? Well, that brings us to the second point. The focus of Jabez's life showed how he was more honorable than his brethren.

And it says here that he called upon the God of Israel. That was the focus of his life. He did business with God in heaven.

And how was that making him different from the rest? Well, you may remember that Israel had imbibed and taken on board much of the idolatry of the Canaanite nations.

There was Baalism, and there was the following of Ashtaroth, and people were worshipping the sun and the moon and the stars.

You read that in Numbers 25, that the Moabites invited the people to sacrifice to their gods. And the people ate and bowed down to their gods.

[12 : 23] So Israel yoked himself to Baal Peor. And then it goes on in Judges chapter 2, the same kind of thing, that they abandoned the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.

And coming down to chapter 8 in Jeremiah verse 2, the sun and the moon and the stars which they have loved and served, which they have gone after and which they have sought and worshipped. Can you believe that a nation such as Israel, that had seen such marvellous things down through the centuries, had gone and embraced the idols of these heathen nations?

Well, that was the general atmosphere, the tone of society, in the day in which Jabez was living. He was living in a society, maybe something like we are ourselves in the western world today.

People worship all sorts of gods. They have different foci in their lives. Some people look to this and get their strength from this and that and the other thing, and the God of heaven is disregarded.

[13:39] It's as if he doesn't exist at all. But this man, Jabez, was more honourable. He knew that there was a God in heaven.

He had heard all the history about the way God created the earth and the heavens out of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days and all very good.

He had heard about the way God had taken the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt, how he had given them a law on Mount Sinai, how he had made known to them that he was a holy God and a just God, a God who doesn't abide evil, a God who punishes evil, a God whom people ought to bow down before and worship him.

And down through the years and the centuries of our own nation, was so greatly blessed through the work of that God among our people, with revivals of religion and the blessing of our people, giving them a biblical framework to their thinking, a biblical framework for their life.

And so many people nowadays don't regard the biblical framework, not the biblical ethic. They want to do their own thing, situation, ethics, if it feels good to do it now, I'll just do it.

[15:14] Doesn't really matter if there are any consequences or not, I'll just do it and please myself. Isn't that the way so many people nowadays live and think? Jabez wasn't like that.

It says here that he had a very special focus and he was calling on the God of Israel, the God of Israel, the Holy One of Israel, the God who is able to give life and life everlasting, the God who is able to give strength in the face of weakness, who is able to give grace, and forgive sin and cleanse from all unrighteousness, the God before whom we must stand at the judgment seat, because the Bible says we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, there to receive according to what we have done in the body, whether it is good or whether it is bad, every one of us.

So his focus was heavenward, is your focus heavenward? Is your longing after the God of heaven, the creator and the saviour, Jesus Christ our Lord?

God, the apostle Paul said of himself, for to me to live is Christ. What is it for you to live?

How do you describe your life? How is it made up? What are the priorities of your life? What's the focus of your life? Well, the focus of the man of God who was Paul, he said, Christ is the focus of my life.

[17:01] life. He saved me and he promises to give me eternal life and he promises that to all who believe in him. So that was the second thing.

They're coming particularly to the prayer of Jabez. As he called upon the Lord, he has, I think, four petitions here that are left for us written in verse 10.

Oh, he says that you would bless me. You find in the Gaelic, in the authorized version, that you would bless me indeed.

There's an emphasis in the original that seems to be missing in this particular translation. As if he were saying, blessing, blessing me.

He wants a real heavenly life-changing blessing from heaven. And that's what it says here.

[18:13] Bless me indeed. Have you started asking the Lord to bless you? Jesus, in that marvelous verse in Matthew chapter 7 says, Ask and it will be given to you.

Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be opened to you. Well, this man knew that secret and he knew his God in heaven and he came with the confidence that is appropriate for those who believe in that God.

and they are encouraged to come with boldness to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. And this is what he says, that they would bless me with blessings.

things. I know that there are some nowadays who hang a lot of their prosperity gospel teaching and preaching on a verse like this.

They say, well, Jabez was really after more territory and he was after more riches and certainly down through the centuries if the Lord favoured the people he would give them rich harvests and so on and he would be with them as they conquered their enemies.

[19 : 44] But I think it's more appropriate to look for a spiritual meaning in what Jabez here is saying, given the kind of man he is said to be more honourable than his brethren.

And it says that he would bless me. What kind of blessings do you think he would be looking for? Well, if he thought back to the experiences of Jacob of old, when Jacob wrestled with the angel at Penuel and he acknowledged that the Lord had blessed him there, and the angel said in the wrestling that went on, let me go for the day is breaking.

And you know what Jacob said, I will not let you go until you bless me. And the scripture says he blessed him there. It's a life-changing, life-enriching experience for Jacob at that particular place. And that's the kind of thing that this man is looking for because he's of the same mind and the same caliber, as it were, of Jacob.

[21 : 07] They were honorable men, men who feared God. And we see that the blessing came upon Jacob at Penuel. when the apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 1 and verse 3, he describes the blessing that they have.

He speaks of spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And that's the kind of blessing that we need to seek for ourselves.

all that you would forgive my sin, that you would cleanse my iniquity, that you would give me to know the love of Christ in my heart, that you would assure me that my sins are forgiven and my iniquities cleansed.

Just like Isaiah of old, remember when he saw the Lord high and lifted up and his train filled the temple and Isaiah responded by saying, woe is me, for I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.

Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. And we read then that God commanded one of the seraphim, and the seraphim took a live coal with tongs from off the altar and placed the live coal upon the lips of the prophet, assuring him that his sin was forgiven and his iniquities cleansed.

[22 : 46] That's what we need ourselves, to know the power of Christ's death in our lives, so that our sins will be forgiven and our iniquities cleansed.

Isn't it wonderful that the Lord can hear such a prayer as mine? when the psalmist in Psalm 130, and we'll sing that psalm at the end, God willing, he says, Lord, from the depths, to thee I cried. He was down there in dejection and possibly with a great burden of sin upon him and feeling a failure and feeling the darkness accompanying all of these failures in his life and he called upon the Lord and the Lord answered him.

He bowed down his ear to me. What an amazing statement that is. Remember when Samson, Samson at the very end of his life, the Philistines had put out his eyes.

They had put him into prison for many years. And this particular day, they took him out of prison and he was asked to walk around and he was made sport of by the Philistines.

[24 : 26] And it says in Judges 16 that Samson prayed, Lord, remember me, strengthen me one more time.

And he got a hold of the two central pillars of that great temple of Baal and pulled the whole place down. The Lord remembered him. The Spirit of God came upon him and many were slain that day, more than he had slain during his life.

He slew on the day of his death. Lord, remember me. When you go to bed at night, when you have worship before you go to bed, do you have a prayer?

Do you have a prayer something like this? Lord, remember me. The thief on the cross had that prayer, the very last moment of his life, and the Lord heard him and answered him.

What about the prayer the church had in the Song of Solomon? The longing she had in chapter 1, verse 2, when she says, let him, that is Christ, kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for your lips are sweeter than wine.

[26 : 00] Do you have a prayer like that? That Christ would come into your life and kiss you with the kiss of forgiveness and the kiss of salvation and the kiss that brings eternal life into your very soul?

Well, Jabez prayed and he said, oh, that you would bless me. That's the first thing. And the second thing I believe he prays for is that the Lord would enlarge his border.

Now, some suggest that Jabez having come into the land of Canaan, being of the tribe of Judah, and you know that all the tribes were allocated up a piece of land in the nation of Canaan, the Lord divided it to them, and each one of them was meant to deal with those who were inhabiting the land and destroy them, because they were a people given over to idolatry of various kinds.

But what had happened, of course, was many people of Israel didn't destroy the Canaanites and the Canaanites and their ways impinged on the life of the Israelites and the Israelites were drawn into captivity, into idolatry, and eventually landed in captivity.

Enlarge my border. I don't believe he's asking for more territory. I believe he's asking for an enlargement of his heart and of his soul and of his spiritual experience.

[27 : 46] those of us who profess to have a fellowship with Christ, are we happy with the level at which we find ourselves?

I mean, are you happy with the progress you're making? Are you satisfied that you're doing very well in the Christian life?

Well, if you're anything like me, I'm always complaining that I'm not what I ought to be. Especially when I read the scriptures and the Bible reminds me of what I ought to be and how I ought to be.

And when I come against that verse like this, God says, be ye holy for I am holy. Who can measure himself against a verse like that and be satisfied?

no. Jabez here is saying, enlarge my border. I want to be more holy. I want to be more useful in the cause of Christ.

[28 : 53] I want to have more spirituality and bear more fruit unto holiness. You know, there are so many enemies seeking to crowd us in, aren't there?

There are so many worldly influences trying to steal into our way of thinking, into our minds, taking, as it were, blunting the edge of what the scripture is saying.

And well, there are so many people nowadays and they don't believe in the Ten Commandments and they don't believe in the sanctity of human life and all of these different things. You could go on and on with the list.

and this man is saying, Lord, come and inhabit my heart and my life more. And I know that if you come in, your influence will be so beneficial and so God-glorifying and so sanctifying and so strengthening, enabling me to live to your glory more and more.

You know, by nature, we have lost all our territory, if I can use it, use that word. He says, enlarge my border.

[30 : 23] By nature, we have lost our borders. What do I mean? Well, when you go back to Genesis and the fall of man, you know, Adam lost his fellowship with God.

He came under his wrath and curse. And it's as if, because of sin, he sits or lies shackled in sin and under the condemnation of God in the prison house out of which he cannot take himself because all ability has been taken from him by the power of sin.

And what is Jabez saying? Well, take away the power of sin. Unshackle me from this terrible tyrant that sin is and give me to walk at liberty.

Give me to walk with the liberty of the gospel more and more. The psalmist, I think, in Psalm 139, at verse 32, has it exactly right, so far as this particular petition of Jabez is concerned.

The psalmist says, I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart. And when the Lord comes in with his blessing to enlarge our heart, we are enlarged in our love to him.

[32 : 01] We are enlarged in our love, spiritual and holy love to one another. We are enlarged in our desire to please him and to serve him. It's as if he expands us.

Peter has it exactly right in the second epistle when he says, in his very last words in the epistle, he says to those to whom he is writing, grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

And I believe that sums up what Jabez here is saying, enlarge my border. May I not be a spiritual dwarf, but give me to grow and grow and grow in holiness and the knowledge of the Lord.

Enlarge my border. And then the third thing that he asks for in this prayer is that your hand might be with me.

that your hand might be with me. Well, the hand of the creator is almighty, isn't it?

[33 : 25] The hand of God as he sustains the universe in its greatness and in its subatomic level.

It's the hand of the mighty God who sustains everything in being so that if he were to take away his hand, the whole universe would revert to nothingness.

And see the way he demonstrated his mighty hand with the children of Israel as they came out of Egypt. See the way he protected them, opened the sea for them at the Red Sea, the way his hand provided food from heaven for them in the manna, the way his hand opened the dry rock out of which water gushed forth and that rock followed them all the way.

In other words, the water from that rock fed them during their wilderness journey. He says in Deuteronomy 33, assuring them, I will make your shoes iron and brass and as your days so shall your strength be.

Where is the strength coming from? The mighty hand of God, the almighty hand of God, his right hand is almighty. And Jabez, knowing that God, he applies to him so that that mighty hand can be with him and for him.

[35 : 24] He is the mighty God of Israel and he is the mighty God of all who believe in him.

Whoever they are, whenever they live, his power is available to those who trust him. Not only by way of power, strengthening them but also protecting them.

Protecting them from their enemies, protecting them from the powers that would seek to destroy them. them. Isn't it amazing?

There are so many stories told about the way people felt protected during wartime and since then. The way they felt that the Lord himself put an umbrella above them and surrounded them by his arms so that nothing could happen.

I know somebody who was at the Allied landings in Italy in World War II and he was on one of the landing craft and he had been in the wheel house and his stint on the wheel house came to the point where he had to come off and somebody else went on.

[36 : 52] And he was standing outside the door smoking relaxing for a moment in the middle of a doll and somebody came his way and he had to stand aside and a second after he had stood aside an unexploded shell went right through the door in front of where he had been standing.

Well I believe that was the protection of God. And many other instances like that. Well in the Christian life it is not just unexploded shells but the power of evil and the Lord protects his people from the power of evil.

Imagine this man Jabez in the midst of the idolatry open to all kinds of suggestion and temptation nevertheless he said Lord if you are with me who can be against me?

you can be against me. When David faced up to Goliath Goliath making all sorts of rough noises and I'm going to give you flesh to the birds of the air and the animals of the field you come to me David said as a young lad you come to me with sword and spear but I come to you in the name of the Lord God of Israel and he remembered then the God who delivered me from the paw of the bear and from the paw of the lion he will deliver me from you and so he did that your hand would be with me he says and then that you would keep me from harm keep me from harm or from evil for the greatest evil in the world is sin isn't it and Satan will try and cause us to sin and lead us to sin in various ways sometimes he will use the whirlpool approach where he puts a temptation away out there at the edge of the whirlpool of suggestion and as time goes on maybe days or weeks the suggestion comes nearer and nearer and eventually it's the centre and you fall into sin other times he will come all of a sudden and he wants you to fall into sin this man this man is saying keep me from harm keep me from evil keep me from sin lead us not into temptation

Jesus says but deliver us from evil this man had it a thousand years before Christ came the same sentiment and then he says finally God granted what he asked well if you go through the list again bless me indeed with heavenly eternal blessings extend my borders give me to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ your hand let it be with me and keep me from evil and it says God came with the answer and he answered him giving him his blessing extending his borders showing him that his hand was with him and keeping him from evil such a

[40 : 48] God is the God who has sent me to you this evening and who has written in the scriptures come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn of me I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest unto your souls my yoke is easy and my burden is light praise God that he has the glorious gospel message left with us still and the invitations are real and when you come in response to the invitation you'll find that it is real also what he promises to give may God bless these thoughts to us let us pray I I

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