

A Grain of Gold amongst the Gravel

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn now to the passage we read in 1 Chronicles, 1 Chronicles chapter 4, looking especially verses 9 to 10.

Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, or Jabez, saying, Because I bore him in pain, Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, O that you would 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. Still possible to pan for gold in various parts of Scotland.

One particular part in Dumfries and Galloway, near One Lock Head, was famous for the gold that was found there and mined there. And in fact, it is from that gold, which is among the purest form of gold in the world, in fact.

It's from that part of the Scottish crown was formed, and it's the oldest crown amongst the royal regalia in the whole of the United Kingdom.

[1 : 1 9] And that gold from One Lock Head, as it was formed into part of the crown for the kings of Scotland, prior to the Union in 1707, it was famous because of its quality.

Panning for gold is something that is done, you've seen it, I'm sure, done on video, when you take something like a shallow basin, and you put some gravel from the streams or rivers from the area where gold is found, and you actually just then wash it through with water from the stream.

And as you do this in a swirling motion, the lighter grains of sand and gravel are washed away, and the heavier grains of gold are then actually left. And eventually, at the end of the process, you can look and hopefully find some little grains of gold shining in the bottom of the basin.

That's panning for gold. So you can really say that compared to the amount of gravel that you have to wash out, the amount of gold you're left with is actually very small, although, of course, it's very precious if it's of the quality of the gold of One Lock Head.

Now, I don't know how much gold they're able to find in One Lock Head nowadays, probably not very much, but there are still some people that do. And I remember being at a camp down in the Fries and Galloway there near Moniive, one time going to One Lock Head and being shown by one of those people who demonstrated this to us, how it was still possible.

[2 : 4 7] And they could just tiny, tiny little specks of gold were actually visible on the bottom of that basin as the gold was being panned. And something like that in this chapter, we've got all these names which we've read through, most of them, and they're just a list of names.

And all these chapters in the Bible that have lists of names are still the Word of God. They're still important in their own right. But you can't make much of them, really, when it's just a list of them like that.

Or you can actually ask, well, why are they in this part of the Scriptures, and what is the purpose for them? But amongst the list of names, you then come across verses 9 to 10, which is just like a grain of gold amongst the gravel.

If you compare these names, the list of names, to just the gravel, without being disrespectful to any of the names or to Scripture, compared to verses 9 and 10, they are just like the gravel, in which this grain, this nugget of gold, is actually found.

Because here is more detail about this man Jabez. And the details we're given about him are, in fact, really pure gold in what they say about him.

[4 : 02] So it's a grain of gold, or a nugget of gold, amongst the gravel. Why is it here? What's the purpose of this? Well, I think we mentioned sometime in the past that the books of Chronicles, 1 and 2 Chronicles, were actually written to encourage those who had come back from the exile in Babylon after 70 years, and had begun to rebuild in Jerusalem, not only rebuild the temple, but rebuild the cause of God, if you like, there in Jerusalem.

And they needed encouragement through certain prophets at the time, but also through the likes of these books of the Chronicles, where the history and their past was recorded, but with such events as these were also recorded, so that that would prove to be their encouragement.

There they were, back in Jerusalem, but living in the midst of paganism, and in the midst of decline, and in the midst of all sorts of an admixture of beliefs, even from those who were left behind and didn't end up in Babylon.

But these were people who sought to reestablish the cause of God, surrounded by that. So coming across a nugget of gold, as we've called it, in the list of these names, the likes of that, would really hugely encourage them that this man, Yebes, or Yabes, is described as such a prominent godly man, and was able to live that sort of life, despite the conditions of the time, for he was more honorable than all his brothers.

So the focus, really, on Jabez, or Yabes, focus in what we're told about him, is really on expansion, victory, security, and all of that being addressed to God in prayer.

[5 : 50] Now, the people who came back would actually take from that, or should be able to take from that, these very same values themselves. The importance of expansion, the importance of increase, and of increase of the cause they represented.

The importance of victory over their enemies. You remember that from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, especially, how huge opposition faced them in the work they were doing, how they had to overcome that.

And security, as they would find their security in God himself, and in his provisions for them. So that's why we're looking at this grain of gold amongst the gravel, that we ourselves can find these values, and these qualities for ourselves, in our own lives, for the generation we belong to.

Expansion, and victory, and security, and also how that is importantly addressed to God through prayer. Well, first of all, what Jabez was like.

Secondly, what Jabez prayed for. And finally, just in a word and conclusion, what Jabez received from God. What was he like, this man Jabez?

[7 : 02] Well, we're told that he was more honorable than his brothers. The word honorable there, it means he stood out from amongst his contemporaries, his brothers, his contemporaries, not just his own family, but those around him at the time.

And being more honorable really means, literally in Hebrew, the word means having more weight. That doesn't mean in a physical sense. We don't know what he was like physically, but we know that he was weighty in his character, that he was weighty in terms of his moral and spiritual life.

That is really what it means. He had more weight to him. He had more significance to his life. He was more honorable. He had something of that quality of moral and spiritual weight than all his contemporaries, than all his brothers.

And there's nothing else known about him apart from what you find in these verses. And that too is significant. Because there are people like that in the Bible.

They're commended by God for their character, sometimes more so than what they achieved. We're not told what he achieved, but we are told that God granted him what he asked.

[8 : 19] So we assume from that, rightly, that God granted him enlargement of his border, that God granted him that his hand would be with him, that God granted him that he would keep him from harm.

All of these things were given by God in answer to his prayer. But we don't have a long list of achievements. And that's something to bear in mind as we think of ourselves today in our own generation as well.

It's firstly to do with our character, our moral and spiritual weightiness. That's the grain of gold that we must be amongst the gravel of this world, amongst the gravel of opposition to the gospel and to what we represent and what we stand for as individuals and as a congregation.

And it's not so much that a long list of achievements will be something that we leave behind in our memory. Maybe that will be the case. But the important thing is, whatever we achieve or don't achieve, whatever we're remembered for in terms of achievement or not, it's important we're remembered in terms of our character, our commitment to God, our faithfulness to him, our living a life of obedience to him.

And God granted him what he asked. That really isn't the best epitaph that you and I could have.

[9 : 47] As it was said of somebody else, that he was a man full of the Spirit of God. A man full of the Spirit of God.

A woman filled or full of the Spirit of God. It doesn't matter what we achieve in this life, we can leave this life really famous and be empty of any spiritual value.

Be empty of any moral weightiness. It wasn't like that with this man. He was more honorable. He had more significance in terms of moral weight than any of his contemporaries.

And that's what you and I seek to have as an achievement. You can tell this man would be an achiever because of his character. You can tell the people who are achievers because of their character.

It's not because they speak about it. It's not because they boast about it. It's not because they're able to produce a long list of achievements. But you know looking at their lives that these are people of substance. That these are people who will achieve the best things.

[10 : 50] And that's what this man was like. Jabez was like that compared to his contemporaries. The second thing we know about him was that he was a man of prayer. You see what it said here where he says he called, in verse 10, Jabez called upon the God of Israel.

Why is he given that title, the God of Israel, in connection with Jabez as a man of prayer? Well, remember again what the context is. People had been in exile for 70 years.

They needed encouragement. They needed to have a strengthening of themselves. So reading about Jabez as a man of prayer who called upon the God of Israel, we'll say that's our God.

He's the God of promises. He's the God who keeps his promises. He's our covenant God. He's the God who has given us so much to fill our minds with his promises and with his commitment to his promises, with his faithfulness.

The God of Israel, our God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that's too for our lives and the context in which we live, surrounded by the gods of this world, that we serve and commend this God, the God of covenant blessings, that we seek to be a standout people as this man was a standout man, a standout people that we have confidence in this God.

[12 : 24] Even when things seem to be at a very low ebb spiritually or morally in our society, this God has not changed. This God that we address through prayer is still our covenant God.

Take that with you. As you pray for your family, as you pray for yourself, as you pray for your children, as you pray for covenant blessings to be fulfilled in your experience and in your experience as a family.

Remember, this is the God you're praying to. You're not calling upon a God who needs to be stirred into action. A God is reluctant to bless.

You're not praying to a God as if by your efforts, you're moving him to bless you. What he is saying is, I already have set my blessings for my people. They are in Jesus Christ.

I'm committed to these blessings. I'm committed to fulfilling them. But he's saying, I want you to pray to this God of blessing with the confidence that he is true to his promise.

[13 : 21] He prayed. He was a man of prayer. A man who called upon the God of Israel. And thirdly, you can see what he was like.

Not only was he more honorable than all his brothers. Not only was he a man of prayer. He was a man who had learned to live with pain. A man who had learned to live with pain.

You see, his mother called him Jabez. And that word is very, very like the Hebrew word for pain. Because she said, I bore him in pain.

And he comes in part of his prayer to say that you would keep me from harm, from evil, you could say that word means, that it might not bring me pain. So pain was a significant feature of this man's life.

His mother had called him Jabez in relation to the pain she had in giving birth to him. Now we don't know whether it was more than usual pain. Whether it was a difficult birth, it seems to have been.

[14 : 24] But in any case, there was sufficient pain in it. And pain to an extent that she called him Jabez. Closely related to the pain she had in giving him birth.

Giving birth to him. Well, imagine living with a name like that. Imagine living with a name that just reflected pain. Imagine living with a name where people associated you with pain.

It possibly was the case that because he was a man of God and more honorable in his generation than any of his brothers, because he was significant for his commitment to God and his insistence on living for God, maybe people thought he was a pain.

I'm sure they many times said, that man is a pain. That's what people will tell you when you live for God, when you seek to live as a nugget of gold surrounded by gravel, that you want to change, that you would like to see change.

But in order to see that change, you've got to be true to God and live for God. So you're going to be thought of as a pain. People who are actually publicly standing for God, as we all should to some extent, will always be regarded as something of a nuisance and have a nuisance value and a pain value to those who are committed against the gospel.

[15 : 41] And it comes across in the comments, it comes across in the writings, it comes across in the media, it comes across in different ways. It's going to be a pain for Christ. Well, be a pain for the Lord.

That's what he set you in the world to be. To actually be a stirrer of the conscience of the world so that they will see something of Christ in you.

Well, he was associated with pain, he knew of pain. But you see, the problem we have is that we sometimes don't handle pain very well. This man had learned to live with pain.

The fact that he was associated with pain, even to the very fact of carrying a name associated with pain, it didn't interrupt his godliness, it didn't interrupt his communion with God, it didn't interrupt his life for God.

He used his pain well, in other words. That's a very difficult thing to do. All of us here today know what pain is. We all know what physical pain is.

[16 : 49] Physical pain can sometimes be very, very difficult to live with when it's an ongoing pain, when it's a physical condition that involves physical pain, and when medical treatment doesn't necessarily put it, deal with it in a way that does away with it altogether.

But there's also spiritual pain, moral pain, psychological pain, pains to do with distress, disappointment, frustration, anguish, losses.

All of these things that are painful to us in life. What do we do with them? How do we use them?

We just express frustration, which of course we can even to God, who understands our pain. Well, we have to carry our pain productively.

The Bible tells us, in many cases, how to do that. It's a book of instruction, in many ways, as to how the Christian in experiencing pain of various kinds and calibers and extents, carries that pain in a way that uses it to their advantage.

[18 : 10] Remember Paul, who experienced more pain than most people as a Christian? As he wrote to the Corinthian church, he said, that he considered these light afflictions, which are but for a moment or temporary, to be a far greater weight than the sufferings of this present time.

These afflictions, these light afflictions, which are for a moment, which are temporary, are working for us. They're productive for us. Of what? Of an eternal weight of glory, which is exceedingly more than the weight of the pain.

That's how he saw it. He knew that God's providence involved pain for him, crushing disappointments, people letting him down, unexpected events, imprisonments, beatings.

He describes them in the list that he gives in his writings. But then he can say, as he said to the Romans, I consider the sufferings of this present time not worthy of comparison to the glory that awaits us.

And as he said to the Corinthians, he calls them our light affliction. Why were they light? When he could describe them in such terms of being, the weight of these sufferings were so enormous.

[19 : 35] When he described them as sufferings that were piling up in his life and came to a great pile, a great heap, as he named them. How could he call them light afflictions? Because he was measuring them against his future.

And not only was he measuring them against his future, but he was measuring them in a way that saw how God actually used pain in his sanctification, in his blessing of Paul, to advance his spiritual knowledge and achievement and holiness of life.

And there's something like that here in this man, Jabez. He was a man who lived with pain, but he used his pain well.

And that's what you and I have to learn to do. It doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't come all at once. Even the Apostle Paul, as he wrote to the Philippians, had said, I have learned in whatever state I am therein to be content or therewith to be content.

It wasn't something that actually came to him the moment he became a Christian, the moment that he met with Jesus on the way to Damascus, the moment Jesus converted him. He didn't then say, that's it, I've now learned how to deal with pain.

[20 : 55] He had to work at it. He had to learn by the experiences of carrying pain and meeting with pain and suffering disappointments and all the things he suffered. I have learned in these states that I'm in to be content.

And there's the secret of happiness. to be content with God and what he provides for us. And it's one of the most difficult things to achieve.

But that's Jabez, this grain of gold surrounded by gravel. What he was like. He was more honorable than all his brothers. He was a man of prayer.

He was a man who learned to live with pain. But what was it he prayed for? Well, he prayed, first of all, for God's blessing. Oh, that you would bless me. And the word bless me indeed, as it is in the older translations, really brings out the strength of Jabez's prayer.

Oh, that you would bless me indeed. Bless me with that blessing which you, Lord, alone can give. And in fact, the Hebrew of it is almost exactly the same as what you find in Genesis 2, 22, verse 17, where God had said to Abraham, blessing, I will bless you.

[22 : 14] Which really is the same as what Jabez is calling upon God to do. Oh, blessing, please bless me. It's a Hebrew form of intensity, if you like, of saying, bless me indeed, bless me abundantly.

As God said to Abraham, blessing, I will bless you, means I will bless you abundantly. And here is Jabez following that pattern saying, Lord, bless me indeed, bless me abundantly, because everything else he's going to ask for has to come under the blessing of God.

Everything he needs to know of achievement in his life, of living with disappointment, with pain, of continuing to be a man of moral and spiritual weight, has to be by God's blessing.

Without God's blessing, he will never be any of that, nor will you and I, oh, that you would bless me indeed. So he's calling on God as the covenant God, the God of Israel, as we've said, to bless him indeed, to bless him with his covenant blessings, with salvation blessing, more than any other blessing.

God blesses us every single day we live in different ways. We have blessings of material blessings. We have blessings where we have so many things in our lives that others don't have, not even in the community around us, let alone in other parts of the world.

[23 : 36] Do we give thanks adequately for that? I'm sure I don't. But above that, we seek spiritual blessing. We seek a blessing by God of our lives spiritually to enable us to thrive spiritually and morally.

We seek blessing for ourselves individually, for our families, for our children to grow to know the Lord. Covenant blessings. blessings as a congregation that we be true to God, that we be effective for God.

Blessing from God so that we would make an impact positively in this age, in this community that we have been set in. That we would indeed be a nugget of gold amongst the gravel.

Blessing is essential. The blessing of God. The blessing abundantly that God has in store that we can tap into and must through prayer.

And he prays secondly for expansion. Oh, that you would bless me indeed and enlarge my border. Now he may be thinking geographically there primarily that his territory would be enlarged, that it would be made secure but also increased.

[24 : 48] But obviously, there's a spiritual value to that as well. When he's saying that you would bless me and enlarge my border, you and I can take from that today something of really importance spiritually.

Because we have a lot of territory spiritually to repossess, don't we? The borders of atheism and of humanism and of secularism have actually steadily increased their territory in our society.

And we as Christians, we as a Christian church have to be committed as Yabes was in prayer to God to say, Lord, enlarge my territory. Bless the gospel.

Bless us under the gospel. Bless the gospel through us. Enlarge my own territory. Spiritually is what you pray. Give me an increase in my life to know more of you, Lord.

To be more effective for you. But we pray that for ourselves as Christians together. Think of the way in which the gospel is attacked and gospel values attacked in recent times itself.

[25 : 59] Think of the territory that's presently occupied by unbelief in the various sectors of society where we can see so much of a worldly influence coming steadily to erode the advance and the influence of the gospel even from times past.

Well, here's our prayer today. Oh, Lord, that you would bless us indeed to enlarge our territory, to enable us to retake the territory that's gone over to those enemies of the gospel.

Of course, you don't want to do them harm. That's not what it's about. But you want them converted too. You want the leadership of those movements converted.

You want to see them coming to know the Lord for themselves and to see things from inside the security that's in Christ instead of ridiculing it from the outside. Because that's the problem with them, isn't it?

The problem for those who really come and make that sort of attack against the gospel, they're looking from outside of the power of Christ's resurrection. When you come to know the Lord, you're taken into the power of His resurrection, the power over sin and over death that He gives you as a Christian.

[27 : 13] And it makes all the difference in the world to look at the world from inside the resurrection power of Christ than it does to look at the world and the church from outside it.

Oh, that you would indeed enlarge my border. Isn't that what we're committed to? It's a congregation. Isn't that why we're teaching our young people the things of the gospel?

Isn't that why we're so delighted that so many of them come to church services with their parents, attend Sunday school, go to youth club, come to tweenies to parent and toddler? Isn't that why we have other things alongside of the services?

I'm not going to say that these are more important than the services of worship. Of course, they're not. But it's really all about spiritual territory, isn't it?

Because you want to advance for Christ. You want to advance the territory that's occupied by his people and by the values of the gospel and by the power of the gospel and of his truth.

[28 : 25] And that's what you learn from Jabez. That's what he prayed for. That you would enlarge our border. And may God grant us that blessing by which we as a congregation would know of spiritual territory increased by which means, of course, that our influence is increased by the blessing of God.

That we come to see the gospel itself pervading other areas of society where presently they're very largely lacking and where unbelief and atheism is so dominant.

Not just locally but nationally too. And of course, I've mentioned one example of that earlier in the bulletin in the intimations along with that in terms of local elections.

That's what you're seeking. That's what you're seeking in coming as Christians to actually cast your vote which is your privilege. You know, to do it in such a way that would seek to maintain or even increase and advance the territory of the Lord.

The values that have been for generations precious to so many in this community and that are in danger of being eroded and will be eroded unless we exercise our freedom and our privilege for the Lord.

- [29 : 43] So that's the second thing. He prayed for expansion. He prayed, thirdly, for success that your hand might be with me. Well, when you read up the hand of God in the Bible it's always itself such a rich description, a rich reference, isn't it?

The hand of God. What is the hand of God? The hand that creates. The hand that shelters. The hand that protects. The hand that guides.

The hand that nurtures. The hand that shepherds. The hand that soothes. The hand that stirs. The hand that disciplines.

You could add to that list the hand of God. That your hand might be with me. In a way it's just saying that you would bless me abundantly because when the hand of the Lord is upon you then you are under His blessing.

What he's saying is that your hand might be upon me. That you would continue, Lord, with your own creative, protective, comforting power and presence to enable me to know success.

- [30 : 57] It's not wrong to use the word success in describing a Christian. But there's success and success. There's success which is other than that which is through the hand of the Lord upon us and it doesn't achieve much.

but there's the success where God with His hand upon us enables us to thrive for Him and to be productive for Him.

That your hand, He says, might be upon me. You can pray that as we've said in many regards to your own experience. For God's comfort, for God's strengthening of you, for God's direction, for God's protection, for all the things that we mentioned in the previous list, short list.

It's all there. The hand of God. And finally, He prayed for His protection. That you would keep me from harm. The word harm is really evil.

That you would keep me from evil so that it might not bring me pain. We've said this man lived with pain. His name was associated with pain. What He's saying now is, Lord, protect me so that I don't end up with pain.

- [32 : 09] Now, He doesn't say here that it's not the same as asking God to keep him from suffering, to keep him from pain, absolutely. What He's really saying is, keep me, Lord, from the pain that's involved in evil taking hold of me.

Keep me from the grip of evil that would result in such pain. It's really similar to what the Lord taught the disciples. as we have in the Lord's Prayer, as you know very well.

We're taught to pray something along these lines as well. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Don't let evil, Lord, have its grip upon me.

Lead me into its grip. Lead me into the pain that's associated with being in its grip or control. Keep me from evil that it might not bring me pain.

God's protection, we need it every moment of our lives. We put it to Him in prayer. It's an important element in what Jabez prayed for.

- [33 : 22] He prayed for God's blessing. He prayed for expansion. He prayed for success. He prayed for protection. And thirdly, what did Jabez receive?

What was he like? What did he pray for? What did he receive? Well, verse 10 finishes saying, God granted what he asked. That's quite an amazing statement.

God granted what he asked. Everything that Jabez asked for were told there that God granted him. He answered his prayer by giving him what he requested.

God actually blessed him abundantly. God enlarged his border. God's hand was upon him or with him. God kept him from harm, from the grip of evil taking hold in his life.

God granted what he asked. Wasn't Jabez honored that God granted him what he asked?

[34 : 27] Yes, indeed he was. Of course he was. But you know, the primary thought from that reference that God granted him what he asked is not how honored Jabez was by God giving him so much.

The primary thought is that God was honored that Jabez could ask him for so much. God was honored that Jabez asked him for so much.

And you and I honor God when we ask him all that is free for us to receive from him in blessing. When we ask him to bless us abundantly.

When we ask him for enlarging of our territory. when we ask him for success as hand being upon us. When we ask him for keeping us from the grip of evil and all that we do.

God is saying I am honored that you could ask me and did ask me such a lot because I have the capacity to give it to you.

[35 : 46] May it be so. Let's pray. Lord our God we thank you today for the abundant blessing that you have indeed in store for those who love you.

And we give thanks for the way in which we experience that from time to time for the way that we can say with the psalmist how great is the goodness which you keep in store for those who fear you.

And how you have described those blessings in Jesus Christ who is set in the heavenly places and all the blessings of your covenant blessings for your people are already deposited in him.

Help us we pray to access them through prayer. Enable us Lord we pray to know the prayer of Yabbas for ourselves. And please grant us Lord an answer to our request as you did for him.

Hear us we pray for Jesus sake. Amen. Let's conclude our worship this morning singing Psalm 126 Psalm 126 in the Scottish Psalter Tunis Denfield and that's on page 419.

[37 : 00] When Zion's bondage God turned back as men had dreamed where we then filled with laughter was our mouth our tongue with melody. They among the heathens said the Lord great things for them hath wrought the Lord the Lord hath done great things for us whence joy to us is brought.

Psalm 126 the whole of the Psalm to the tune Denfield. Amen. When Zion's bondage God turned back as men that dreamed were we then filled with laughter was our mouth our tongue with melody.

They among the heathens said the Lord great things for them hath wrought the Lord hath done great things for us whence joy to us is brought as streams of water in the south our bondage Lord we call who sow in tears a reaping time of joy and joy they shall that man who bearing precious seed in going forth doth mourn he doubtless bringing back his sheeds rejoicing shall return

I'll go to this side or on this side this morning now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always Amenman the Father to you be with you Lord you you son you iPhone God God■■■heen Ag God God God God