

JABEZ = THE PRAYER THAT WILL CHANGE YOUR WORLD

John 10:10 *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”*

1 Chronicles 4:9 *Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.” And Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, “Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!”* **So God granted him what he requested.**

Right in the middle of a boring account of the genealogy of the Israelites pops up this amazing postscript about an unknown man. His life starts out badly, he prays an unusual, one sentence prayer and things ended extraordinarily well for him.

The prayer of Jabez has risen to prominence throughout the Christian world over the last few years and it's no wonder – locked up within this sentence is a world of promise just waiting for you and I to unpack.

Jabez lived in southern Israel just after the conquest of Canaan during the time of the Judges – the deliverers who came after Joshua. He was born into the tribe of Judah and eventually became the head of his clan. Yet his story really begins with his name: *“His mother called his name Jabez, saying, “Because I bore him in pain.”* In Hebrew the word Jabez means *“pain.”* A literal rendering could read, *“He causes (or will cause) pain.”* All babies arrive with a certain amount of pain but there was something out of the ordinary with the birth of Jabez. So much so that his mum chose to call her son after her experience.

In the Jewish culture a name carried great significance. A name to them, defined a person's future. It was prophetic of the type of person they would become and the life that they would lead. For example the name Jacob can mean grabber or deceiver – an apt description of the man who God later changed in a dramatic way, so much so that he received a new name. Naomi and her husband named their two sons Mahlon and Chilion translated “puny” and “pining” and that was exactly what they were like. They both died in early adulthood. Solomon means “peace” and it was during his reign as king of Israel that the country, for the first time in their history, never went to war.

But despite his bad start in life, Jabez discovered a way to turn things completely around. Jabez had heard from a very young age, all about the exploits of God as He led his people out of captivity in Egypt to their promised land. Somewhere along the way an idea had taken root in his mind. If God was so powerful, maybe he could turn his future into something that held more than just pain and so Jabez did a very bold thing, he asked God to bless him. The thing that I love about Jabez is that he identified the solution to his dilemma and pursued it with all his heart. You see he knew that the only way out of his situation, the only way to a much better future, was on the coattails of God and so he reached out to God and God responded. What is it about us asking that seems to bring such a huge response from God? I mean God knows everything so surely he's already aware that we need his help.

This morning when you woke up did you lie in bed for a few moments and thank God that you could breath – that your eyes worked, that your legs were able to move? Or did you just get up and go about your business without any thought to your physical condition? You see most of us take our world and our lives for granted. By requiring us to ask for his blessing God ensures that we're aware of where they come from. It helps us to realise that our provision comes from him.

We live in a physical world, God operates in the realm of the spirit. To access His blessing we need to exercise faith. Faith connects the physical world with the spiritual world and gives God room to move in our lives. What are you believing God for? What have you been asking Him for? Not just hoping or wishing for but earnestly asking Him for, operating your faith. God requires that we act intentionally and when we do He always responds because it's his heart to do so.

Also as we interact with God our relationship with Him deepens which is of great importance to God. Many of us when we're first saved ask God for lots of things but then as we get along in our journey it's easy to slip back and not ask as much as we used to. When we stop asking we stop noticing God's answers and our lives can grow stale. It's as we ask that we remain dependant on Him and enjoy answers to our prayers.

Jabez knew that he needed to ask God to help him and he didn't simply pray a nice little pray, he went for broke. And God granted what he requested!! What an encouragement to all of us to persist in our prayers.

Jabez asked for 4 things:

That he would be blessed
That his territory would be expanded
That God's hand would be with him
And that he would be kept from evil so that he wouldn't cause pain.

Let's have a look at these four things.

1) That he would be blessed

Before we can ask for God's blessing with confidence, we need a clear understanding of what the word "blessing" means. We ask God to bless our parents, bless our kids, bless the missionaries and the food we're about to eat. It's something Grandma says when we're about to sneeze. No wonder the meaning of blessing gets watered down to something vague and innocuous like "have a nice day." No wonder so many Christians aren't as desperate as Jabez was to receive it. To bless in the biblical sense means to ask for or impart supernatural favour. When we ask for God's blessing we're not asking for more of what we could get ourselves. We're crying out for the wonderful, unlimited goodness that only God has the power to give to us. This kind of richness is what the writer was referring to in Proverbs when he said "The Lord's blessing is our greatest wealth; all our work adds nothing to it" (Prov 10:22 TLB)

2) That his territory would be expanded

The next part of Jabez's prayer, a plea for more territory, is where you ask God to enlarge your life so you can make a greater impact for Him.

A passage in the bible that came to mean a great deal to me during a very challenging time in my life is found in Psm 18:16-19 *"He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me."*

God loves to increase our boundaries, to expand our territory, to bring us into a spacious place of greater influence and blessing and why shouldn't He? Every Father wants his children to experience life at least as much as they have. God lives in a place of wonderful freedom and effectiveness and he wants the same for all of his children.

I read a great quote the other day in a youth conference brochure that went *“Why do you try so hard to fit in when you were made to stand out?”* God wants your life to be so blessed that everyone around you is blessed as well – he gave that promise to Abraham. He wants your life to produce fruit, to produce a crop 70, 90 a 100 times that which was planted. He wants you to multiply the talents he has given you and prepare to judge angels and rule cities in the age to come. If His heart is so much for you, what are you waiting for.

Over the last few months I've learnt a little about the frustration that God must sometimes feel with us. I've had people come to me wanting to do certain things and when I've said, *“Go right ahead”*, I've had some of them turn to me and say that they couldn't because so and so wouldn't approve. When I've reminded them that I'm the senior pastor of the church and I'll speak to the person involved and get it all sorted they've then said *“Oh no, you can't do that.”* And guess what, I can't. I find myself restricted in exercising the authority I have because they don't want me to. How many times has God wanted to really bless us with greater responsibility and influence only to have us pay more attention to what others may or may not be doing or saying. How many people use others as an excuse for their lack of progress? How many people make excuses for why they haven't been all their heart desires them to be? How many people feel that they're at the mercy of their circumstance when all along God is saying, *“What do you want to do? Just ask me and I'll make it happen, after all I'm the ruler of your universe.”*

Jabez dared to ask God to expand his territory and God granted him his request. Why? Because He could and He wanted to! So you've got a desire in your heart to set up a home for runaway teenagers – what's stopping you asking God? *“Oh but I don't have the finances, I don't have the experience, I don't have the support of others.”* So? Does that scare God? Does it make Him tremble in His boots? Does He lack the power to help you and provide everything you need? I can imagine God sitting in his office twiddling His thumbs because no-one is asking Him for something that they can't get in their own strength. He sees us dreaming about doing great things for Him but never asking Him to help because we just can't get beyond our own insecurities and fears. Church, we need to understand something about God – there is nothing that's too difficult for Him to do. If we would just ask and faint not. Don't grow weary in doing good for in due season you WILL reap a harvest – it will happen! To pray for larger borders is to ask for a miracle – it's not asking God to do something for you that you can do yourself. It's asking Him to do something for you that you can't do yourself.

3) That God's hand would be with him

So you've asked God to bless you and enlarge your territory – you've stepped out way over you head. Guess what you need now? You need the hand of God to be with you big time. I mean it's the difference between living out here in the middle of the river or heading back to the shallows along the shore. It's the difference between walking on water or sinking underneath. And it flies in the face of what we've been taught to do all our lives – we're taught to be self-sufficient, to be bigger, better, stronger, smarter. Dependency is seen as a weakness, not the territory of the successful, the powerful, the rich. However with God the exact opposite is the truth. Until we learn that we need to exchange our strength for His strength we will always be limited in what we attempt and consequently achieve. Paul had it figured out. He said, *"When I am weak then I am strong because God's strength has a chance to shine through me, and guess what – his weakest day is a billion times better than my best day. Therefore I'll happily tell you about my weaknesses because it means I'm going to be depending on God even more."* What a great place to live!

4) And that he would be kept from evil so that he wouldn't cause pain.

I really like this last part of Jabez's prayer. It's very similar to the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples to pray – *"Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil."* I don't know about you but I'd rather give temptation a wide berth. I'm quite happy to let God set the boundaries around me. Jabez had a very keen understanding of the outcome of sin in his life – if anything was going to cause pain it was sin. If he was to have any chance of cancelling out the effect of his name then he needed to avoid evil at all costs. Sin will always lead us to pain, either personal or relational. It can seem at the time that the opposite is true but in the clear light of day I challenge anyone to set out a case to me where sin doesn't end up causing pain. Our God knows how to live this life He's given us and as we saw 2 weeks ago, the type of seed we sow in our lives will always produce a crop after its' own kind. Greed produces a crop, lying, stealing, gossip, envy, unfaithfulness, all produce a crop in our lives – God won't be mocked – we reap what we sow.

Each morning you need to cry out to God – keep me from evil that I might not cause pain – it should be one of the most prayed prayers of a Grace Christian – how else can we hope to get the most out of this life God has given us?

Let's stand and I'd like you to repeat after me the words of Jabez's prayer

“Oh, that You would bless me indeed, and enlarge my territory, that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain!” **So God granted him what he requested.**