

The Prayer of Jabez 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

What a pain! Has anyone ever said that about you? Have you said it about anyone? My older sister probably did to me. My much older brothers called me 'Menace' after Dennis the Menace. And as her last child my mother told me I was the best mistake her and Dad had ever made, but never a pain. It was however said about the person we are looking at in this scripture today. Jabez's name in Hebrew means "pain and sorrow"! His mother delivered him in great pain and she never let him forget it. She named him Pain so that he would always remember what he had done to his poor mother, and so would everyone in his family and the world when they called out his name, Hey Pain. In spite of all that, 'Pain' overcame the obstacles created by his upbringing. Despite this the Bible says he was an honourable man, more honorable than the rest of his family meaning he was a man of high integrity and morality. Why was that? Well, we find Jabez buried in a long list of genealogies... So and so was the father of so and so, and so and so was the father of so and so. So, it goes on for the first nine chapters in the 1st Chronicles, with 600 plus names. If you read from chapter one the genealogies, by the time you reach Jabez you could be so bored that you run the risk of skipping over or missing him. But there he is as the only one to stand out in this long list of anonymous characters. It is significant that what Jabez is remembered for is not some outstanding achievement. He was not a great leader or warrior or builder. He simply prayed a prayer and for that he is remembered the most from this genealogical list.

What is so unusual about this prayer?

Let us look at it to discover why God was pleased enough with it to have it forever recorded in scripture. Jabez' prayer was in four parts each making its own point: [1) He prayed that God would bless him. 2) He prayed that God would enlarge his territory, or his borders. 3) He prayed that God's hand would be upon him. 4) He prayed that God would keep him from pain/evil.

The first point is: Jabez prayed that God would bless him.

He sought God's blessing on his life.

He was not worried about being selfish; he wanted God's best and believed that God wanted to give it to him. He remembered his ancestor Abraham, when the Lord said to him:

"I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing" (Genesis 12:22).

Jabez sought the blessing of God that he might be a blessing to the world. The Bible tells us that our whole reason for existence is to be a blessing to God and a blessing to the world. You are not here just for you. The world does not revolve around you. Your whole purpose for existence is to be a blessing to others. You and I are blessed to be a blessing! Even swimmer Michael Phelps in his Olympic comeback, with a total of 22 gold medals, has discovered this truth through Rick Warren's Book, 'The Purpose Driven Life.' He is a blessing to his partner, recent child and others. So, there is nothing wrong with praying to God to bless you, if it is for the purpose of being a blessing.

It is not wrong to pray for wealth, if you are wanting to bless people with your material blessings. If you want to have more so that you can give more, then that is an acceptable prayer. If you want to be able to give more to the needy or to missions and outreach programs so that people will come to know Christ, then by all means pray for material prosperity, as did Rex and Barbara Stone praying for provision to found our local Mercy Mission.

If you want wisdom so that you can help other people then pray for wisdom, for the Bible says, *"If any of you lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him"* (James 1:5). If you want wisdom so you can feel smarter than other people, your prayer will not be answered. If you want success, or want to be a leader, so that you can lord it over others, your prayer will not be answered. But if you want to serve others with more gifting, talents and resources, then pray for those things in order that your life may be a blessing to others.

If you are struggling in your relationship with God you can pray and ask that God would bless you, revive your soul and bring a new passion for God; a new zeal for serving him; a new desire to have your life be a blessing to the world.

The surest sign that I am growing as a Christian is that, within me there is a growing desire to have my life used by God. This is the opposite of having a preoccupation with ourselves, where it is all about us, which is characteristic of society today. We want more, and we want it faster, better and, as a kiwi, definitely cheaper. But, our lives become shallow and self-centered when we are worried about how we look, what we have, and who might have more.

So many people as a result never aspire to a purpose larger than themselves. This is why Jabez prayed the second part of his prayer: Jabez prayed that God would enlarge his borders.

Jabez was from the tribe of Judah, which was the ruling class among the Hebrews. To increase his territory meant that his people would have more area to live in and that he would have more people to serve as a leader. He was not thinking of himself, he was thinking about the welfare of others. A leader is a servant of other people. Jabez wanted to be used by God more than anything else. Is that your prayer and desire? Is there a longing, a passion inside of you, to be used by God no matter what it takes? Are you living only for yourself at this time, or do you want God to use your life in this world? Do you want to be blessed by God to be a blessing? Then pray for God to enlarge your life and your sphere of influence. Ask him for something so big that you cannot possibly do it by yourself. Ask him to enlarge your territory. Surely there is more to life than trying to make yourself happy.

As parents, grand parents, uncles and aunties we often hope for the best for the younger generations- that they would do well, become good people with education, training, careers, a good job, an income and a home and family. Those are nice thoughts but I must say, inspired by Jabez, the first thing I need to be praying for my children is that God would give them spiritual gifts in order that they might be used by him in this world. I can pray that they would have a passion for serving God and that he would give them the necessary tools to serve him. And as a pastor, I can pray in a similar fashion for the church. I do not want us to be merely a social club, a community service organisation, an historical society, or a family business. I want us to be God's people, being used by him in a world that needs Jesus Christ desperately. I want us to live for more than ourselves, and our own interests. I pray that our lives would be used up in serving God by serving the needs of others. I want to be a part of what God wants to do in his plan to redeem this world beginning right here in Drury at this church. It is challenging, almost disheartening at times in our attempts to share the gospel and make disciples today as it was for Israel. In a time of great discouragement, God spoke through the prophet Isaiah saying, "*Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes*" (Isaiah 54:2). God wants you to see beyond the circumstances. He wants to enlarge your life if you will join him by

praying and believing for his blessing. The third point to consider is: Jabez prayed for God's hand to be upon him. Jabez knew that what he was praying for was bigger than what he could accomplish himself. He was praying for something so big that only the hand of God on his life could accomplish it, reminding me of young Charles Ma, and his creative vision from God for the Auranga subdivision.

What would you pray for if you knew that you could not fail? What is God speaking to you about that you have been ignoring? What have you dreamed about, but dismissed because you thought it was an impossible dream? Begin to pray for the hand of God to be upon your life so that you can accomplish something great for him. Hopefully, it will be something so great that when it comes to pass, you and everyone else will have to say, "This had to be the hand of God, because there is no way I could have done this by myself!"

The final part and point of Jabez's prayer is the most important: Jabez prayed that God would keep him from evil. Our NIV translation misses the point, when it says, "*Keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain.*" The New King James puts it like this: "*Keep me from evil that I might not cause pain.*" It is actually a play on words. His name meant pain. He had caused pain, but he did not want to cause any more pain. He wanted his life to be a blessing. He wanted to be protected from the harm of evil, but he also wanted to be kept from sinning, because he knew that sin causes pain. It brings pain into the world. It brings pain into the life of the one who commits it, and it brings pain into the lives of those whom the sin was committed against. But most of all, sin causes God pain.

Do you remember what the world was like just prior to the flood in Noah's day? The Bible says that, "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time." Then it says, "The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain" (Genesis 6:5-6). Sin brings pain to the heart of God. If you do not believe that, you need to take another look at the cross. We miss the pain of God in our protestant churches because Jesus is missing from the cross. We have our crosses made of smooth wood. We wear the cross as shiny jewelry. But the cross was an instrument of torture. Sin caused God real pain. Even in Art Jesus is often pictured on the cross, but his body is clean and his head is

lifted toward heaven with a sublime look of peace on his face. But the real crucifixion was much different. He was naked and the flesh on his back and chest had been shredded by Roman whips. His body was filthy and there were deep bruises from the beatings. The painful crown of thorns caused streams of blood from his head to cascade down his body. But all of that was nothing compared to the moment God poured out upon him the sin of the whole world and separated himself from the Son. Sin causes pain. David said, *"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you"* (Psalm 119:11). Jesus taught us to pray the prayer of Jabez when he prayed, *"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one"* (Matthew 6:13).

And if you think you can get by with sin without there being pain in your own personal life, you are mistaken. It will be like a cancer eating its way through your life. It will strip you of God's blessing and destroy your effectiveness. It will tear apart your relationships and leave you very much alone. It will leave you beaten, and it will alienate you from God. Pray that you will be kept from evil and from the pain it inflicts. Because if you do, you will experience the blessing of God and feel his hand upon your life.

God is in the blessing business, for he says to you today, *"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior"* (Isaiah 43:1b-3).

Take hold of the promises of God and do something great for him. Go ahead and ask him for something much greater than yourself and what you could ever have imagined. Why shoot for the moon when you can reach the stars when it is the desire of your heart and God's will, coming together in your life, especially when you know that it's not about you, and that you have been blessed by God to be a blessing to others and the world.

Let us take a moment of silence to allow God to examine us so that we might ask forgiveness for any sin and be right to cry out to God together... *'Oh God, 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!'*

To finish: As he did with Jabez - May God grant your request!