

## THE PRAYER OF JABEZ

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**Scripture:** 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

The past six weeks we've explored prayer from various angles. We've looked at unanswered prayer and what it means for us. We've looked at what does it mean to pray in the name of Jesus. Then, we've looked at the Lord's Prayer. We looked at petitions made about God and then petitions made from us to God. We also looked at what it means to be specific, to pray with a certain amount of specificity to God, that the prayers are very targeted towards what our needs are and very specific as we take it to the Lord.

One of the common threads that has emerged is that we're invited to come before Him with boldness, not with any sense of reticence or timidity, but to come boldly before Him, and to come with what's on our hearts. Sometimes we are good at façades. We camouflage the things that are really on our hearts from people around us sometimes or most of the time. But with God, we can come exactly how we are and say what we need, because He already knows. He knows what's going on in our struggles. And so, we bring those things to Him.

Today, we will look at 1 Chronicles 4: 9-10, particularly v. 10. It's the prayer of Jabez.

*<sup>10</sup> Jabez cried out to the God of Israel, Oh, that you would bless me and enlarge my territory. Let your hand be with me and keep me from harm so that I will be free from pain. And God granted his request.*

In this one verse, there are 5 components of his prayer that I'd like for us to look at.

1. He invites or asks God to bless him.
2. He asks God to enlarge his territory.
3. He says, "Let Your hand be upon me,"
4. "Keep me from harm,"
5. "Let me be free from pain."

Five requests in this one verse. So let's unpack it a little and see what we can glean from it and apply to our own lives.

### **1. BLESS ME.**

Oh that You would bless me! Now Jabez understood that God is the source of all blessings and was not ashamed to ask for them. But we need to ask the question: What does blessing mean? is it just a matter of wealth or physical well-being? No! Scripturally, it means much more. It has a spiritual component, a relational, emotional, intellectual components. When we talk about blessing, it's all-encompassing. God is the source of every blessing, every good thing that comes our way. In fact, James would say, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not change like shifting shadows."

2 Corinthians 9:8 says that God not only blesses, but He supplies abundantly. And God is able to bless you abundantly. God is not a stingy God. He doesn't look at it and say, "Okay, this time I'm going to give you just this much because last time I gave you a little less. He gives abundantly more that we can ever hope or explain or understand.

But alongside this blessing, we have two parts to it. the blessing that comes to us must also be given away. God told and reminded Abraham, "I will bless you." And then He says, "You will be a blessing."

So, the blessings that we receive, the good things we receive from God, we're not to store it in ourselves and keep it to ourselves. The Dead Sea is the Dead Sea because there's no outlet to it. That's why! We run the risk of being completely barren if we hold on to all the blessings. When you hold on to all the blessings, there's no room for God to continue to bless you. You're filled up. So you need to be able to give it away as well. That's a component of blessing.

We need to ask ourselves: How often do I ask God to bless me? How often do I say, "Lord, bless me so that I can be a blessing to others." You've heard me talk about the little boy who was fascinated by this red car that came and parked at the curb. When the man got out, the boy got up and walked all around the car, admiring it. When the man came back and saw the little boy looking at his car, he said, "This car was given to me by my brother." The boy looked in wonder and got a faraway expression in his eyes. The man said, "I know what you're thinking. You are wishing you had a brother like that, isn't it?" And the boy said, "No. I'm thinking that I wish I could be that brother."

That's the kind of attitude that you and I need to have when we look at the blessing of God in our lives.

## **2. ENLARGE MY TERRITORY.**

Expand my kingdom influence or the influence that I have. When we look at the Israelites, their influence was directly connected to the land that they had. The more land that you had, the more power, the more influence you had. So, Jabez was well within his purview when he said, "Expand for me my territory. Enlarge my territory." But part of that expansion was that, along with expansion comes responsibility. Because when you have influence, you need to use it responsibly especially when that influence is connected to the kingdom of God, and God has enlarged your territory.

So today, maybe our prayer is not enlarge my territory. It might be extremely difficult to get that much of land in Mumbai. We are happy with the cubic feet that we have. but when we pray, "Lord enlarge", the land has to do with influence. Enlarge the influence that I have. Why? If I had more influence, then I can influence people towards Your kingdom. Remember, that was the main reason that God set apart the children of Israel, that they would be a city on a hill, and showcase what it meant for a city completely dedicated to Yahweh would look like.

The children of Israel failed to do that, which is why today the church has been tasked with that responsibility, you and I, to showcase what it means. And so we use the influence that we have to point to God and bring others into the kingdom. Today, we might ask God to increase our influence with greater opportunities to serve and lead people to him.

Or we might ask to show us more ways to impact people with the gospel, or to enlarge our wisdom, skills and gifts for His kingdom so that, with greater resources, we could be more effective. All of these act as influences to showcase God, more opportunities to teach, to mentor, to disciple people and lead to the expanding of God's kingdom.

## **3. LET YOUR HAND BE UPON ME.**

I want to rely on Your presence and Your presence alone. Jabez understood that blessings and expansion meant nothing without God's presence. Remember Moses who said, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Beloved, it is pointless if we have all the influence and don't have God's presence to lead and to guide us. That's a travesty as far as the kingdom is concerned.

Nehemiah said, "The king granted me what I asked, for the good hand of my God was upon me." Time and time again, he kept telling the people that God's hand was upon him, and he was able to

accomplish what they couldn't accomplish for so many years. In 52 days, that wall was completed because the good hand of the Lord was upon him.

That was Jabez's prayer, that God's hand would be upon him. Maybe that's something that we've not thought about. Maybe we ought to ask the Lord daily, as we step out, as we wake up – Lord, I want to make sure that Your hand is always on me. Let it be on me through this day, Lord, in all that I do. May Your hand be upon me so that I only operate in Your strength and in Your power.

#### **4. KEEP ME FROM HARM.**

Protect me from the enemy. Jabez knew that when God blesses and expands a person's influence, spiritual attacks will follow. Whenever you're doing something good and significant, a consequence for the Lord, Satan always pops up and says: I need to cut this down. because he can't stand that. So, Jabez is saying, "Keep me from harm."

Where does harm come from? It comes from many areas.

- It can come from doubt and fear. The enemy often tries to make us question whether it is truly from God. Or even worse, tries to tell us that we don't deserve it. How often we look at a blessing that we received and say, "I don't deserve this." And then, we don't operate in that blessing. It's just wasted. Fear and doubt can come in.
- Pride and self-sufficiency as well. Blessings can sometimes lead to pride making us rely on our own strength rather than on God. You remember the story of King Uzziah in 2 Chronicles 26. He prospered, but later became prideful, which led to his downfall.
- Increased temptations. As temptations come your way because of the influence that you have, then Satan really turns his arrows on you. Remember David, a man after God's own heart. Then temptations came. We read about just one of them, Bathsheba, and how he fell.
- Also distractions from God's purpose. Blessings can sometimes lead us to get comfortable and neglect prayer or worship or even ministry. We begin to get comfortable with where we are. Being comfortable always leads to a sense of complacency. We just begin to go through the motions. Remember Solomon – despite all his wealth and the fact that God gave him wisdom, he fell away as he began to take on different wives.
- Then opposition, not just from Satan, but from people as well. When God blesses, there are people who become envious or critical or even hostile towards you. Joseph's brothers are a case in point. They couldn't stand the fact that God was giving dreams to Joseph, so they plotted to do away with him.
- Spiritual warfare and attacks also come on health and family or finances. Job was a righteous man, and yet, Satan attacked his health, wealth, and family.
- Discouragement and weariness. Blessings often come with greater responsibilities, which can lead to exhaustion. You're just completely done. There's nothing left in you. Then discouragement creeps in and takes charge. Remember Elijah. One of the greatest victories on Mount Carmel. And then the next chapter, you read that he was fleeing for his life. Then he sits there, 40 miles out in another land. He says, "Take my life from me." One moment on the hilltop, next moment right down in the valley.

So how do you overcome these attacks? As you pray and say: Lord, keep me from this. Keep me safe. Don't let these things harm me. Our attitudes are important as well.

- Have an attitude of humility, not to get proud of the things that we have. stay humble.
- Acknowledge that all blessings come from God.
- Stay in the word. Make sure that you're reading the word of God.  
Use the word, use scripture as a weapon against deception and temptation. Remember that Jesus used scripture so powerfully. For some reason, I think in the last six weeks, one of the themes that has come through prayer is how much we need to spend time in the word. And I cannot emphasize it more. Even if you feel that you don't have the inclination to read the Word, make it a discipline.
- Recognize the enemy schemes and resist them. 1 Peter 5 "Resist the evil one and he will flee from you."
- Stay in a fellowship. Surround yourself with godly people who will pray for you, to whom you can be accountable.

Blessings are meant to draw us closer to the blesser, now away from Him. Don't ever get so captured and captivated by the blessing that you forget where it came from. Always keep Him firmly there. "<y prayer," Jesus said, "is not that You take them out of the world, but that You protect them from the evil one." Jesus' prayer was about making sure that no harm comes to us, that God would protect us.

#### **5. LET ME BE FREE FROM PAIN.**

Deliver me from my struggles so that I will be free from pain. Jabez's very name meant pain. In 1 Chronicles 4:9 it reads, *"and his mother named him Jabez saying, 'because I gave birth to him in pain.'"* And yet, when you look at Jabez, here is a man who's reaching out to God and saying: God bless me. This is not a man who is weighed down, cowed down. A man who is bold, looking to God and saying, "Lord, these are the things I want." And he finds his way into scripture, just two verses about him, but he's there. He prays boldly.

And yet, it could very easily have affected him, affected how he thought about himself, his identity. Think about it for a minute. It could have affected his identity. His name was pain. Every time someone called his name, it was a reminder. It's like naming somebody pain and saying, "Hey Pain, come here!" Ouch. "One more reminder that I brought pain to my mother." He could have lived under a cloud of emotional burden, shame or limitation, believing he was destined for this. But he rose above it, didn't allow it to define him. He could have struggled with a sense of rejection. If his birth was especially painful or traumatic, his mother's choice of name may indicate bitterness, grief, difficulty in accepting his arrival. Imagine his name always reminding him that maybe his mother didn't really welcome him. He could have faced rejection.

Or he could have created a spiritual or social stigma as well. In ancient cultures, names often influenced how others saw you. And so every time he came, people said "Jabez is coming," along with that was 'pain is coming'. It could have been an internal stigma for him when he was called, but it seems like he didn't allow that to happen.

It could have limited his aspirations as well. he could have felt trapped by who he was, or others' expectations of himself that he could never amount to much because he was somebody who was named Jabez. And yet, he broke through all of those to come boldly before God and say, "God, I want You to bless me. I want You to enlarge my territory." Boldly he came.

I wonder whether there are some of you sitting here who have allowed the past to color your present and also to mar your future. Is there a trauma in your childhood or growing up years that has stuck like a stigma? I wonder whether you've grown up with something that has hurt you, words that may have been spoken over you that doesn't allow you to realize your potential. Or maybe today it has shaped who you are, your identity. And I wonder whether God would be looking at you and

saying: "That's not who I created you to be. When I created you, I made you as My masterpiece, not the way you look at yourself today." The Bible says that we are God's masterpiece. This is very good, He said.

Maybe this morning, you need to go back to that thing that you think is defining you and say, "I will not let it define me for I am a child of God. I have His heritage and everything that comes from being His child." And one of the lessons we learn from Jabez is that our past does not define our destiny. Sometimes our past is like baggage that we carry everywhere we go, weighed down by it.

I wonder whether that's why Jesus looked at people around Him and said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Maybe that's been a long time coming for you; just to rest. I was thinking of the children of Israel, and Canaan to be a place of rest. And sometimes, when there's no war, no turmoil, it's just a place where you can enjoy God's presence. I wonder whether that day is today.

### **THE FINAL CHALLENGE**

The final challenge for us as we look at Jabez is: Do you believe God wants to bless you? Have you gone to God and said, "Lord, would You bless me?" Have you asked Him to increase your influence? Are you dependent on His hand to guide you? Or did you leave the Lord way behind? And are you praying for protection against the enemy? Are you trying to fight by yourself? Are you surrendering your past pain to Him?

Just before I came in at 8 o'clock into the church, I was in the office, and I just finished my preparation for the sermon, had it printed out and was putting it into my binder. As I was praying for our service, God gave me a picture that I couldn't get out of my head. It was a picture of somebody weighed down with a burden, bent forward. It was like God was trying to wedge His fingers between that burden and the person and lift it. It was such a powerful picture; I couldn't shake it. Just those 2 hands trying to wedge underneath that burden to lift it. and somehow, I was looking at this whole thing with Jabez and the five points.

I kept getting drawn to this one about pain – to let there not be pain. I felt that that's what God wanted to do in our midst here today. And maybe there are some of you who can understand or catch hold of the first 4 points and you're fine with that. But in my spirit, I feel that there are some of you who are in incredible pain, but that God wants to alleviate that pain today. I don't know; I don't do this very often. But when I get a picture like this, and I was praying, "Lord, where do I share it? How's it going to work?" and it only came to me when I was sitting in the first service, to bring it in with this pain that God wanted to alleviate today. And so beloved, if you walked into this sanctuary in pain, and you managed to cover it with a façade/front till now, I believe that God wants to meet you, that He wants to do something with that pain. He wants to lift it off your back, off that situation.

I want to end our time in prayer this morning, and I want to ask you to be as bold as Jabez was, to ask for these things. I want to invite you to come to the altar. Just come if the Spirit of God is touching your heart and saying: This is your moment. Moments with God are always *kairos* moments, not *kronos*. *Kronos* is our time; our watch tells us. *Kairos* moments are between you and God. If God is speaking to you today and saying, "You're the one I'm thinking of," would you just get up and come and kneel here. I want to pray for us.

Let's pray.

Amen.