

June 12, 2005

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

(Ideas based on the book *The Prayer of Jabez*, by Bruce Wilkinson)

“Jabez”

1 Chron 4:9-10, NLT

There was a man named Jabez who was more distinguished than any of his brothers. His mother named him Jabez because his birth had been so painful. 10 He was the one who prayed to the God of Israel, "Oh, that you would bless me and extend my lands! Please be with me in all that I do, and keep me from all trouble and pain!" And God granted him his request.

In our Old Testament readings this week we started the book of 1 Chronicles. Now, I don't know if you are reading along with the suggested readings we give you each week, but have you ever read 1 Chronicles? It begins by listing the descendants of Adam and continues, chapter after chapter, to list descendant after descendant, after descendant. Well, I have to confess that rather than read each name, I started to just skim through the verses when suddenly right in the midst of the list of descendants of Judah in 1 Chron 4:6-8 which tells us that: Helah gave birth to Zereth, Izhar, Ethnan, and Koz, who became the ancestor of Anub, Zobebah, and all the families of Aharhel son of Harum. Exciting stuff, huh? Suddenly there in the midst of this history is this brief biography of Jabez, in chapter 4: 9-10. Then verse 11 just continues to list names of more descendants of Judah as if nothing happened. But something about the life of Jabez caused the historical writer of 1 Chronicles to pause and say, “by the way we come now in this listing of names to the time when Jabez was born. You have to hear about Jabez who was more distinguished than any of his relatives. He really stood out and I would like to tell you why.” Well, that got my attention so I paused and started to think about Jabez, wondering what was so important about him that he deserved a few words in the midst of everyone else just having their name listed. I remembered a book that came out about 5 years ago called, *The Prayer of Jabez*, by Bruce Wilkinson (many of the ideas in this message are from that book). Besides, while I was studying for the ministry I met another man who was studying. We became friends, and his name was, Jabez. I can't imagine that his mother knew the meaning of the name, for my friend Jabez was a warm friendly person. You see, the mother of the Jabez of the Bible gave him that name because it sounded like the Hebrew word that means “pain” or “distress.” Can you imagine? Every day growing up he was reminded that he was the cause of his mother's pain and distress. Every time she'd call his name he would be reminded, “Come here Pain and Distress.” “Hey, Pain and Distress, when are you going to clean up your room?” Talk about child abuse...wow! Well, he couldn't have been important just because of the pain he caused his mom in birth, so it must be another reason that he stands out. The only other thing we know about him is the prayer he prayed...that must be it! But what is so great about this one sentence prayer? One important thing I noticed is that God granted him his request. Therefore, it was a prayer that was in accordance with God's will, a prayer God will answer if we pray it. So, let's look because there is something about his prayer: "Oh, that you would bless me and extend my lands (or some versions say, “enlarge my territory”)

Please be with me in all that I do, and  
keep me from all trouble and pain!" (or some versions say, "keep me from evil.").

I have to admit that at first glance I thought, "nice prayer, but not really that impressive." Yet, as I looked at it more closely I started to weep even as I looked at just the first part of the prayer:

1. "Oh, that you would bless me"

Well, that sounds pretty selfish, doesn't it? But wait, remember, "God granted him his request." Could it be that God wants us to pray "Oh, Lord bless... me!"? Remember the meaning of the name Jabez. I don't know if most people hate their names, I think they do or why do most of us have nicknames? I always hated my name, Gerald, that's why I called myself, Jerry. I was embarrassed when my name was called out in class, afraid I'd be teased. But talk about being teased, imagine having the name Jabez. I can hear the kids saying, "Your name is Pain and Distress? What was your mother thinking when she named you?" But, Jabez knew the God of Israel, the God of miracles and in faith he prayed for a new beginning. I can hear Jabez pray, "Oh, Father God, bless me, I don't want to be Pain and Distress for anyone, please bless me, that I may be a blessing instead of pain and distress." When we pray for God's blessing, we are not asking for more for ourselves. We are crying out for the unlimited goodness God has for us so we can be a blessing to others. I'm not talking about wanting material things of myself as we hear today in the preaching of what has become known as the "Prosperity Gospel." I'm not talking about the TV preacher who says, "God wants you to be rich!" Or more like, "Send me your money and God will make you rich." And I know some say, "I want be rich so I can help others." And God is thinking, "Yeah, right!" That's not what Jabez was praying. Jabez was praying for nothing more *and* nothing less than what God wants for us. When we ask for God's blessing we want all that God wants to do in us and through us for His glory. God wants to bless you. Did you hear that? God wants to bless you with what He wants for you, which are good things and for your ultimate good. God WANTS to bless YOU. All you have to do is ask Him to. Matt 7:7a says, "Ask and it will be given to you." And James writes, James 4:2, "You do not have, because you do not ask God."

In Ex 33:19-20 The LORD replied (to Moses), "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and I will call out my name, 'the LORD,' to you. I will show kindness to anyone I choose, and I will show mercy to anyone I choose. And according to Ex 34:6 God described Himself to Moses like this: "I am the LORD, I am the LORD, the merciful and gracious God. I am slow to anger and rich in unfailing love and faithfulness." God is abundantly good and He wants that goodness to overflow into our unworthy lives. God wants to bless us. I don't think that way. I think I am being selfish to ask God to bless me. But God shows us through the prayer of Jabez that He wants us to ask Him to bless us and to bless us a lot! It is God's nature to bless. He cares for us, wants what is best for us. When you are committed to Christ, then you are going to want what God wants. So what you desire God desires too. So, why not pray, "Oh, Lord, that you would bless me." Want you want is the same thing God wants for you, to bless you so you can serve Him better. What God wants to do in and through us is limited by us not Him. Jabez did

not let any thing stop him from asking for God's blessing. God caused the writer of 1 Chron. to record Jabez's short story so that we would know that it doesn't matter what negative things our parents told us would be our fate, it doesn't matter what others think of us, what counts is what God in His abounding, unlimited goodness wants for us and asking Him for it. God wants you to pray that He would bless you, Jabez proved it for "God granted him his request."

2. "Oh, that you would ...extend my lands!" (Enlarge my territory)

Here, as with the prayer for blessing, Jabez teaches us to ask God to enlarge our life so we can make a greater impact for Him. Jabez is not just asking for more land, more real estate. He wanted more opportunities to be more of an influence for God. In other words, Jabez is praying, "Lord whatever you put in my care, is yours so take it, enlarge it and use it for your glory. Give me more opportunities to touch more lives for your glory. Lord, let me do more for you." Let me ask you a question: If God loves us and wants to be with us at all times, why didn't He just take us right to heaven after we received Christ for salvation? Why did He leave us here on earth? The answer is, because God wants us to move beyond our current borders and take new territory for Him. As a church we are praying, "Oh, Lord, enlarge our territory that we might reach and influence more people for you." And as individual followers of Christ we should pray, "Oh, Lord, enlarge my territory that I might reach and influence more people for you." If you do this God will put more people in your path to share your faith with. Who ever you are and whatever you do for a living, God calls you to do His work on earth. It is not a matter of our ability but of our willingness. Just as it is unusual to hear someone pray, "Lord, bless me!" It is also unusual to hear someone pray, "Lord, send more people my way that I can minister to!" But, God would take delight in a prayer like that and will answer it. Jabez proves it. "God granted him his request."

3. "Oh, ... Please be with me in all that I do"

This part of the pray naturally follows. If we dare ask God for an enlarged ministry and if God does indeed bless us by answering these first two parts of the prayer then we are going to need Him to be with us in all He has for us to do. If we pray, Lord bless me so that I may be a blessing to others. Enlarge my borders, send more people to me to minister to," do you know what will follow the answer to that prayer? More people to minister to and with that a feeling that you're in over your head. You will feel that you do not have the skills equal to the task. But, that's a good thing. Do you know why? Because it means you have to depend on God. "You mean I'm supposed to feel like *I* can't do it?" Yes, it's called living by faith. We are supposed to feel like we are attempting something so big, that we can't do it...unless God steps in. Finding ourselves facing a task that is beyond our ability means we have to depend on God...and that is precisely what we were created to do. It is in those moments that we will cry out with Jabez, "'Oh, ... Please be with me in all that I do.'" Then God's power is released to help us accomplish what seemed impossible, His will for His glory. When you pray, Oh God, please help me, I can't do this alone, this is bigger than anything I can handle alone." Then trust God and step out in faith to do what can only be done if He is with you, you will be able to praise God afterwards because you know He did it, He carried you, He empowered you, He gave you the words, the wisdom...it wasn't you it was God through

you. You will not be able to contain your joy and your praise to God. But if you are to experience that kind of excitement and joy, you must be willing to pray for God to bless you, use you for an impossible task and therefore pray for Him to be with you in all you do for Him. When you do you will see results that can only be explained as God being with you. The Father is watching and waiting for you to ask, "Oh, ... Please be with me in all that I do." God will answer that prayer, Jabez proved it for he prayed that way, "And God granted him his request."

4. "Oh, ...keep me from all trouble and pain!" (Keep me from evil)

When you ask God to use you, guess who gets scared and angry? Our enemy, the devil. So Jabez prays to be protected from the works and schemes of Satan who will try to prevent us from doing great things for God. For when you are determined to attempt great things for God the devil will attack you and the people you love, to oppose you, distract you, in order to tempt you to keep you from doing God's will. This is actually a good sign, it means you're doing something right. Notice what Jabez prays, "keep me from evil." We usually pray for strength to endure temptations instead of asking God to keep temptation and evil away from our lives. Jesus taught us to pray, (Matt 6:13) "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." Jesus didn't say pray for strength to endure temptations Jesus didn't say pray for spiritual insight to understand what the enemy is doing. Jesus said pray that we don't face temptation, pray that we are delivered from evil; pray that the harm the evil one wants to do to us does not come upon us. Don't just pray to beat temptation pray to avoid it. God wants you to pray that He will keep you safe from evil. Satan opposes those who want to do great things for God; they are a threat to him. So, the more we pray to be used by God the more we should expect to be confronted by spiritual attack. Stay away from those things that tempt you, pray to not be lead into temptation, but never live in fear or defeat. In Christ we can live in triumph. God wants us to pray to be kept safe from evil. He will answer that prayer. Jabez proved it for he prayed that way, "And God granted him his request."

Pray and receive from God more blessing, more territory, more power and more protection. God wants to do great things through you and you don't have to be a super saint. You don't need more talent, you need to pray, believe, trust and be loyal. I don't want to face God one day and hear Him say, "I wanted to do much more through you, but you wouldn't let me. Think about it: How would your life be different, how would each day be different if each day you prayed and believed that God wants to bless you and use you to bless others, that His powerful hand will be upon you directing you, protecting you using you for His glory.

"Lord bless me, Lord, You want to bless me, You want the same thing I want, to be used by You more and more, to touch many more lives for Jesus through me. Be with me and work through me, and protect me Oh, Lord. As I serve You and others for Your glory."

Pray that and God will grant your request.