

"A Prayer For Grace" • 1 Chronicles 4:9-10

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Treasure In Mud*

1. A gold miner was working on a small vein of gold in a mine
2. After several days, the vein played out
 - a. it ran into a large plug of what looked like soft dark mud
 - b. thinking the vein might continue on the other side of the plug he dug out the mud, put it in buckets, and hauled it to a narrow crack that crossed the floor of the mine tunnel
 - c. then he poured the bucket, one after another into the crack, sending the mud to the unseen depths below
3. After several days work of clearing away the mud, he finally reached the other side of the hole, only to find that there was no more gold
4. Disappointed at all his useless labor for the past several days, he took the last bucket of mud out of the mine entrance and into the light of mid day
5. Standing there at the mouth of the tunnel, he turned the bucket upside down to empty it
6. As he looked at the pile of thick dark mud, he saw the light shine off of something
 - a. stooping down, he rubbed away the mud around it to reveal a good size clear stone
 - b. lifting it out of the mud he took his canteen and poured some water onto the stone
 - c. with mounting excitement, the miner turned it over and over in his hand
 - d. sure enough, it was a diamond--about the size of the end of his thumb
 - e. hurrying back to the pile of mud, he ran his fingers through it and discovered several more diamonds, all about the size of the end of a finger
7. For days he had been working in the semi-dark of the mine, feeling these, what he thought were worthless pieces of rock in the mud
8. In a flash he realized he had poured dozens of buckets of diamond filled mud down that crack to be lost in the depths of the earth forever

B. *Jabesh*

1. One of the common remarks you hear from people is that they have tried to read through the bible, but when they come to the long lists of names, it proves too much for them and they give up
2. They may get through the relatively *short* genealogies of Genesis and Matthew, but when they get to 1 Chronicles, it's a different story
3. You see, the first 9 chapters of 1 Chronicles are long lists of "begats"
4. And the names we find here are no easy feat to pronounce
5. The tendency many people have is to simply scan these chapters and not really read them

6. If you do that, you run the risk of missing out on some really precious *treasure*
7. Such it is here in 1 Chronicles 4
8. Verses 9 & 10 are a treasure just waiting to be mined
9. Unfortunately, most people miss them because they skip these chapters

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 9-10

{9} Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore *him* in pain."

{10} 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.

1. Who is this Jabez and where does he come from?
2. That's an interesting question, because as we look closely, we realize there is simply no evidence anywhere of who he is or where he came from
 - a. Jabez isn't listed as anyone's son or father
 - b. his name just appears here in two verses, out of no where
 - c. and then he isn't mentioned again!
3. Because he is mentioned in the genealogy of the tribe of Judah, it's safe to conclude he came from that family
4. But no more is said about him than what we find in these 2 verses
5. And I think there is good reason for that
6. I think God wants us to see Jabez as an important example of grace

B. Jabez's Prayer

1. What do we learn about Jabez from these verses?
2. Well, first of all, we learn that his mother stuck him with an unfortunate name
3. "Jabez" means "He brings sorrow" or "He brings pain"
4. She named him this, apparently because it was a difficult labor
 - a. children in ancient Israel were often given names that reflected either the hopes of the parents for that child,
 - b. or they were named after some event that attended their birth
5. Jabez got his name because his birth was a cause of distress to his mother
6. So she called him "He's a Pain"
7. How would you like to go through life with a name like that?
 - a. you go to school for the first time and are introduced to the class
 - b. the teacher says, "Class, I'd like to introduce a new student. He's a pain"
 - c. every time you meet someone new, you have to say, "Hello, I'm a pain"
 - d. who's that over there? He's a pain!
8. Some commentators believe that Jabez may have had some kind of birth disorder that resulted in a difficult pregnancy and delivery
9. Whatever it was, for the rest of his life, he was reminded of it

10. Despite Jabez's unfortunate beginning, he went on to rise above his circumstances
 - a. verse 9 begins with these words . . .

Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers,

- b. this gives us an important clue to Jabez's character
 - c. though he began life with a couple of strikes against him,
 - d. he doesn't let that hinder him from a life of excellence
 - e. he didn't throw up his hands and resign himself to a life of pain and poverty because he had special challenges "normal" people don't have
11. How many people today resign themselves to live substandard lives because of some limitation or unfortunate event in their past?
12. How many of us have given up the pursuit of excellence in our own lives because of this or that excuse?
13. Jabez determined that there would be no excuses for him falling into a life of self pity and neglect
14. He would not blame God for who and what he was
15. Rather, he would live a life of honor before God
16. And having risen in honor over his other "normal" brothers, he sought for even more
17. And so we read in verse 10 . . .

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!"

18. Jabez asked God for 4 things

1) He asked for God's general blessing

- a) without specifying how or why, he just asked in faith that God would shower him with good
 - b) with a humble and yielded heart he simply opened to God and asked for God to favor him
 - c) and trusting in God's goodness, he left it to the Almighty to decide how to make that blessing manifest
-
- d) do you ask for God's blessing on your life?
 - e) do you come to God with an open and ready heart, and ask Him to give you His best?
 - f) I want you to know that in our times of prayer, the pastors pray for you to be blessed
 - g) in my prayer time, I pray this prayer regularly; "God, bless your people with all the fullness of Your blessing. Don't let blessing be lacking Lord, just because I failed to ask for it."
 - h) now, we often say that we need to pray *specifically*, so that when God answers, we'll know it for what it is
 - i) if our prayers are *too* general, then when God answers, we may fail to see them *as* answers
 - j) but it is entirely appropriate to ask God to bless us without specifying how
 - >> we can pray for specific blessings

- >> and we can pray for God to bless us in ways we don't specify
- >> we just cast ourselves upon His wisdom and grace and pray the prayer of Jabez
- >> " Oh, that You would bless me indeed."

2) He asked God to bless him financially

- a) that's what it means when it says he prayed for God to "enlarge his territory"
- b) after asking for a generally blessed life, he specifically asked for financial blessing
- c) was it wrong or carnal for Jabez to ask this of God?
- d) of course not; consider the alternative--should he have asked God for poverty?
- e) no! it is entirely appropriate to ask God to bless us financially
- f) we *should* pray that God would prosper us
- g) in doing so, we are reminded that it is God who is ultimately our source and supply and not the strength of our own hand or intellect
- h) while the Bible teaches that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, it also teaches that we are to look to God daily for our needs
- i) the danger in all of this is to begin to see God as nothing more than a means to becoming prosperous
- j) but that was not Jabez's prayer; he didn't want to be prosperous for the sake of prosperity
- k) he wanted his life to be a testimony to the blessing and goodness of God

- l) we should all pray for God's blessing on our finances
 - >> we take such a strong stance against the prosperity message here at Calvary that I realize it may seem to some that we prefer poverty to wealth
 - >> let me say here and now, that is not the case!
 - >> just as we pray for God's general blessing on you, we also pray that He would bless you financially
 - >> and we pray this because God's abundant provision is a testimony to others of His love and care for His own
 - >> it causes you to give thanks to God and enables you to have more to give to the task of spreading the Kingdom of God here in Ventura County and around the world
- m) now, that brings me to something I want to let you know about . . .
 - >> we have a lot of new members here at Calvary Chapel
 - >> many of you who are new are also new Christians
 - >> one of the questions and comments we've been hearing lately from many is an interest in knowing what the Bible teaches about money
 - >> so I think it's appropriate to mention that we will soon be doing a short series on the Bible and Money on Sunday mornings
 - >> while people say they are weary & leery of hearing churches talk about money, they look forward to it from Calvary because

we look at things from such a clearly biblical framework
>> and you know what, the Bible has a lot to say about money - A LOT!

>> we'll be doing that series soon, so look for it

3) Jabez asked God to bless him with success in life

- a) that's what it means when it says that he prayed "*that God's hand would be with him*"
- b) Jabez didn't just want to be financially successful, he wanted to be successful in all of life
- c) he wanted his relationships to be blessed by God,
 - >> his home life together
 - >> his friendships to be rich and full
 - >> his business dealings to be fruitful
 - >> his life to be marked by peace and health
- d) really, what Jabez was asking was for God's hand to settle down upon him in such a way that he was visibly secure
- e) he wanted others to see God's favor on every area and dimension of his life

-
- f) oh that God's people might pray this prayer with sincerity to the Lord!
 - g) if only the hand of God would be upon us
 - h) that His favor and blessing would so enrich us that we live before the eyes of an unbelieving world with great success and excellence
 - i) you see, God wants the world to not only *hear* the gospel in our preaching; He wants them to *see* it in the quality of our lives!
 - j) Lord, may your hand of favor be upon us!

4) Jabez asked God to bless him spiritually

- a) he prayed "that God would keep him from evil so that he might not cause pain!"
- b) he asked that God would lift him beyond the limitations of his past and set him in a new place
- c) his mother may have tried to shackle him with a name like a ball and chain
- d) but he looked to his Heavenly Father to set him free and reverse the effects of the past
- e) his name might be "He's a pain" but he wanted God to make him a blessing
- f) you see, Jabez knew that the real cause of pain is not the uncontrollable issues of one's physical birth
 - >> real pain comes from evil
 - >> enduring pain comes from unwise and unrighteous choices
- g) Jabez's desire was to be blessed by God so that he could in turn bless others
- h) so he prayed that God would keep him from that which would harm both himself and others - evil

19. The closing words of verse 10 give God's response to Jabez's fourfold

request . . .

So God granted him what he requested.

C. A Lesson in Grace

1. These verses are an enduring lesson in grace
 2. Look closely at them
 - a. no where in Jabez's request for blessing does he base it on his own goodness
 - b. in fact, the text is utterly silent about who or what he was
 - c. we don't know whose son or father he was
 - d. he pops in to the picture, then disappears, never to re emerge
 - e. but when he appears, what do we find?
 - 1) he boldly asks God to bless him
 - 2) and he is totally forthright with God about the content of that blessing
 - 3) he says . . .
 - a) bless me in every way
 - b) bless me financially
 - c) bless me with success in living
 - d) bless me spiritually
 - e) bless me so that I will bless others
 3. And then very simply, we read God's response - He did it!
 4. Do you see the grace here?
 - a. do you see how powerfully these two verses declare the unmerited favor of God
 - b. do you see how they reveal God's heart to bless His people?
 5. Oh, I hope you do
 6. Even more, I hope they move you to come boldly before God and ask for grace
 7. I hope they move you to open up and let His grace flood your life with blessing
 8. Dear friend, God is looking for a Jabez today
 - a. He is looking for people who will stop looking at the past and instead will look to Him
 - b. He is looking for people who will stop making excuses for why they can only live a mediocre religious life and instead will open up and let Him bless them with a passion for excellence
 - c. He is looking for people who aren't trying to make themselves more worthy of God's blessing but instead lose themselves in His goodness
 - d. He is looking for people who have learned the secret of stopping to give Him reasons to bless them and instead cast themselves in utter dependence on Him
-
9. Last Wednesday, after Slava's ordination service, I met a woman named Tatiana
 - a. she spoke passable English so we were able to converse without an interpreter

- b. as we shared, she told me her husband was about to leave for the US to work in a research firm and that he would be gone for 4 months
- c. this was a real concern to her as it would be the longest they had ever been apart
- d. I suggested that we pray about it, that God would make a way for her to be able to accompany her husband to the States
- e. but she balked and laughed and said that she didn't want to pray for that
- f. I was taken back by that response and asked why
- g. she said that she didn't think she was important enough to God to bother Him with something so inconsequential as that
- h. as we talked further it became clear that she had two very wrong ideas about God
 - 1) First - she thought that God only listens to the prayers of important and godly people
 - a) she thought that she had to attain to some special level of holiness and religious influence before God would listen to her
 - b) she was new to the faith, and saw herself as beneath the real love and care of God
 - 2) Second - she thought that her request was too petty and selfish
 - a) she believed that even *if* God *did* love and care for her, this requests was simply too selfish
 - b) she thought the only prayers God would listen to and think about answering were prayers that were utterly selfless
 - c) she genuinely feared that troubling the Almighty with a request like that would make Him angry and might instead result in His wrath rather than blessing
 - d) her view of God was more the view of a mean old man that you want to try to avoid lest you raise His attention and incur His ire
- i. I tried my best to assure her that God was a loving Father who was concerned about those things that His children were concerned with
- j. I said to her, "If you had a 6 year old child, and she came to you with her only doll, lying in her hands broken, with tears steaming down her cheeks and asking you to help her fix it, would you angrily send her away? No. You would likely put aside what you were doing pull that child into your arms, dry her eyes, and tenderly offer your help to repair the doll."
- k. why then do we expect anything less from our Heavenly Father?
- l. if we have human fathers who show us love and tenderness, how much more ready is our Heavenly Father?
- m. yet even with this Tatiana would not commit herself to believe God cared so for her
- n. I told her I was absolutely convinced He did care and wanted to show her that love
- o. so I asked if I could pray for her and she consented
- p. I asked that God would show His grace to her by making a way for her, against the seeming impossibility of funds and visas, to be able to accompany her husband to the US

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Jabez Or Tatiana*

1. Tell me, who are you more like this morning, Jabez or Tatiana?
2. Christian, is grace just a theological term that dwells in your head or is it a living, breathing reality in your heart and life?
3. When was the last time you asked God to bless you, with no strings attached?

B. *To The Lost*

1. Let me end with a brief word to those here who aren't believers
2. I don't know what you believe about God, but this is what God wants you to know about Him
3. HE LOVES YOU more than you can possibly imagine
4. He wants to fill your life with all good things, He wants to bless you
5. But there's a problem - it's called sin
6. Sin blocks the flow of God's blessing because at it's root, sin is the rejection of God
7. God will not force Himself on you, and as long as you hold on to your sin, He honors your wish to leave you alone
8. But in His love, He has done something as an eternal message and sign of His love for you and His willingness to forgive you if you will but turn from your sin to Him
9. That sign is the cross and that message is the gospel
10. If you will repent of your sin, that is turn away from it, and turn in faith to Jesus, God will forgive you and give you a whole new life of blessing
11. As I mentioned, God will not force Himself on you
12. He will draw you by showing you your need of Him and the truthfulness of what I am saying
13. Even now, some of you are being drawn by the Spirit
14. Come to faith. Come to life. Come to grace!