

Here I Am, Lord

10-7-2012

1 Chronicles 4: 9-10

9 Jabez was more honorable than his brothers. His mother had named him Jabez, saying, "I gave birth to him in pain." 10 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.

Some of you may feel that this scripture is a bit different to be using for homecoming. But, then again, you do have me up here preaching, so what else would you expect. I actually went off the Lectionary this week and chose this scripture because it is homecoming. This particular section of scripture is known as the Prayer of Jabez. In 2000, Bruce Wilkinson wrote a little book called The Prayer of Jabez. It is a small book and if you sit down and try, you can read the entire book in an hour or so. Some friends of ours gave this copy to Maggie and I as part of a wedding gift in 2001. It was probably a year or so before I decided to sit down and read the book. It has made a profound difference in my spiritual life. Realistically, it's probably why I'm in the pulpit today. Jabez prayed the prayer for himself and the book is written specifically for individuals. I have actually read the book several times now and feel that it has a message for the church as a whole, not just for individuals. So whether you're a member here, a member somewhere else or thinking about becoming a member let's look at how these two verses can help us personally and help our church as part of the body of Christ.

These two verses fall in the middle of some of the most boring sections of scripture in the Bible. If you start reading 1 Chronicles, 1: 1 you get a genealogical listing of Jewish births from Adam through Abraham. Before we get to Chapter four, there is a listing of over 500 names. Then for some reason, and no one is sure why, when we get to chapter 4, Verse 9 and we get:

⁹Now Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, "Because I bore him in pain." All of a sudden, we switch from a lineage of names to something about this one person who isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible. We read verse ten, then go back to the list of names, who begat who, and that runs through chapter nine.

So why do these two verses appear here. Scholars can only assume that somewhere along here in the lineage is where Jabez is born. Let's listen to verse ten again: **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.** I can't tell you how many articles and commentaries I read on these two verses. One trend of thought is that this is a very selfish prayer; Bless me, enlarge my territory. Some ministers blasted Wilkerson for writing the book, while others praised him. This morning, I'm going to talk about how I see the verses and how I think they might apply to each of us, and to the church.

To me, verse ten is probably the most important of the two verses. I want to break it into four different statements and talk about each one. First point; **Oh, that You would bless me indeed.** That is the first part of Jabez's prayer. Notice Jabez doesn't ask for stuff, Jabez simply asks for God's blessing so he could be a blessing to others. Is it possible that God could want us to be "selfish" in our prayers and actually ask Him to bless us personally? To "bless" in Biblical terms is to receive a supernatural favor. Bless or blessings is a word that tends to be diluted in its meaning today. When someone sneezes we say bless you. When we sit down to eat, we say the blessing. There is nothing supernatural in the way we say it. But, when Jabez prays, he is asking God for supernatural favors. He wants God's way, God's guidance, God's grace and God's power...not his own. When we pray bless us indeed, it should not be not to ask for what we could get for ourselves (new boat, new car, a bigger house, etc.) It is to ask for God's goodness to be given to us, not someone else. It is to ask for God's blessing so that we may be a blessing to someone else. God wants us to ask for his blessing. Listen to Matthew 7: 7-8 ; **"Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.** And in Proverbs 10:22 **The Lord's blessing is our greatest wealth; all our work adds nothing to it.** God wants us to ask Him for His blessing. When most of us pray, we are asking God for something specific; Oh, God, help me get that new job, help me pass this test, help me attain...whatever. Either

that or we are asking God to help someone else. None of that is bad, but have you ever asked God to bless you so that you could be a blessing to someone else?

Have we as a church ever asked for God's blessing? Have we ever asked, God, will you bless Hooker Memorial Christian Church? And if we have asked, have we asked not so we could have more land, or a bigger building or have plenty of money, but did we ask so we could be a blessing to others. When we ask God for his blessings, are we asking for the right reasons? Listen to James 4: 2-3, **You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.** As Christians, a lot of us have a problem asking God to bless us. We pray for our friends, for our fellow church members, our families and we ask for blessings on each one of them. Yet, for some reason we seem to be rather afraid to ask God to bless us; why? Don't you want God to bless you?

Let's look at the second point: **Enlarge my territory.** Hot dog, I can get more land. Maggie and I only have nine acres, maybe now I can get 109 acres or maybe if I pray hard enough, I can get 1009 acres. Isn't that what territory is, land. And if I pray for God to expand my territory, can't I get more land? Wasn't Jabez asking God for more land? That's what some people think. That is exactly why some people are against the prayer of Jabez. They see the entire prayer as Jabez being selfish. I don't see it that way at all. He just asked God to bless him so that he could be a blessing to others. Now he is asking God to allow him to reach more people. Allow me the opportunity to meet more people so that I can bless them with your glory. That's the territory he was talking about. He wants God to help him reach more people. As Christians, isn't that our obligation? Listen to Matthew 28: 18-20, **Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."** These three verses are more commonly called the Great Commission. Go to all nations, not just the Jews, but to everyone. Jesus himself tells us to expand our territory. What would happen in your life if you truly prayed every day, God, please expand my territory? Please allow me the opportunity to reach more people with the good news of Jesus Christ. I want to spread your word and your truth to believers and non-believers. Use me as your vessel. Folks, that's scary stuff. If you pray that and mean it, it will happen. From firsthand experience, trust me, it will happen. When you pray that prayer, here's what you will be asking for: more influence, more responsibility, more opportunity, more service, more ability, more of everything. No person has ever experienced all that God wanted to do through his or her life. In reality, we are the ones who determine what is enough. We are the ones who stop. And all of this holds true not only for us as individuals, but also for us as a church. Are we as a congregation willing to pray, Dear God, we pray that you help us expand the territory of Hooker Memorial Christian Church? If we are willing to pray that prayer, here is what we are asking for: more influence, more responsibility, more opportunity, more service, more ability, more of everything. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard the statement "we need to grow this church". Ladies and gentlemen, I just told you how. Pray as a church, pray to expand our territory. When as a congregation we pray that and mean it, then we will grow. I ran across this quote as I was studying for today's message. I'm not sure who said it, but it rings the truth: "The only evidence of life is growth!" Are we growing; are we expanding our territory?

Third point: **That Your hand would be with me.** When you devoutly and earnestly pray for God to bless you and expand your territory, you better pray for His hand to be with you. You will need His help. Things will begin to happen in your life. And by ourselves, it will be impossible to do all that we have asked God to let us do. **Philippians 4:13, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.** With His hand in ours, the impossible becomes possible. That is part of stepping out in faith. It's taking God by the hand and saying, "OK, you lead! I'm depending on you. I can't do it without you. It's too big for me." When we as a church try to do things by ourselves, when we try to run this church as humans, when we try to grow the church as we want it to grow, we fail. Oh, that your hand would be with us; in other words, God, we're just humans, we need your help and your guidance. We need your hand.

And the fourth point: **that You would keep *me* from evil, that I may not cause pain!** Here's a sobering thought for you; The devil does not want God's kingdom to expand. So evil will attack you on every front. The closer you get to God, the more the devil is going to attack. You have to be ready. You said it once already today, but did you say it or did you pray it; Matthew 6: 13 **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.** You have to be tempted before you sin. Satan tempted Jesus Christ himself three times and each time Jesus said get behind me Satan. We are not as strong as Jesus; we need his hand to help us deny temptation. As individuals we each get tempted daily just by living in the secular world. We can't hide from it. It's just not possible for each of us to run away, to go hide in some monastery somewhere. We face temptation daily. With God's help, we can resist it. As a church, we are faced with the same trappings just because we're humans and as humans, we bring all of our human elements to church with us. Evil causes pain. When is the last time you meant to cause someone pain? When is the last time you tried to hurt someone? I don't think any of us try to purposely hurt others, but somehow we do. It doesn't have to be physical pain; mental, spiritual, or emotional, pain hurts just as much, sometimes even more. Keep me from evil, that I may not cause pain...

This simple prayer of Jabez is the walk of a Christian in relationship with God. Pray for God's favor, pray as you expand His territory, pray for his hand, and pray for His protection from the evil that would distract you from your mission...

...and He will grant what you ask!

Are you ready to pray? Are you ready to say, Here I Am Lord.