

## **A MAN CALLED PAIN**

Let us journey to the book of 1 Chronicles (words of the days in Hebrew, things left behind in the Greek), chapter four and investigate the life and prayer of a man named Jabez. But, before we do, it is important to note that the Chronicles are a retelling of Jewish history and genealogy written by the prophet Ezra (presumably) upon the return to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile. Freed by emperor Artaxerxes, Zerubbabel rebuilt the temple, Nehemiah built the walls and Ezra is credited with restoring the worship. Chapters one through nine deal with the genealogy of Adam through David, with 10-29 focusing primarily on David. Chapter four begins the genealogy of the 12 tribes, beginning with Judah (to give thanks in the Hebrew) and as it journeys down one name to the next, Ezra takes time to elaborate on one particular individual by the name of Jabez.

Our introduction to Jabez says that he was more honorable than his brothers. What do we presume made him more honorable than his peers? He was not a king, a nobleman, a prophet, or a distinguished man. We are not given chapters of information concerning his life but a mere two sentences. This tidbit is followed up by noting that his mother bore him in pain and thus his name was given. Concerning the Hebrews, it was common to receive names with meaning. As a matter of fact, Jewish custom says that a person's name foretells their future. Abraham means "father of nations", Leah means "weary", David means "beloved", Gabriel means "God is my strength", Rachel initially named Benjamin, Ben oni which means "son of my sorrow", but Jacob changed it to Benjamin which means "son of the right hand". You get the picture, but here we have a man who refused to be bound to his name, he knew the Lord had more in store for him. So, four lessons we can learn from these two verses are 1. Don't pass on your pain to others, 2. You can always pray to God, 3. We can ask for blessings, 4. We can bring Him our pain.

The second part of verse nine tells us that his mother named him Jabez, "Because I bore him with pain." How often have we dealt with stressful situations and not felt as if they were justified so we insist on passing that on to others? How many times has a parent caused struggle for their child, not for the sake of learning or discipline, but because "that's how it was for me, so that's how it will be for you"? In Genesis 12:2 God said to Abram "I will make you a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing." What if Jabez' mother thought of him that way, what if we thought of others created in God's image that way? What if we looked at the ones around us and saw more than negative attributes. For example, let's look at the way that God's prophet Ezra looked at him and how his mother looked at him. Ezra says he was more honorable than the others, his mother on the other hand said he caused sorrow. The great thing about Jabez though, is that he let the one who mattered label him. His mother was a resentful individual, while the Lord is pleased to be gracious and merciful. In Luke 6:36, Jesus says "be merciful just as your Father is merciful". In like manner, King Solomon wrote in Proverbs 11:25, "The generous man will be prosperous, and he who waters will himself be watered." With that water comes growth and life.

As someone who likely felt the resentment of his mother and did not see the blessings of his siblings, what Jabez did next is what we should learn from, he prayed. There is never an inappropriate time to go to the Lord in prayer. We have a picture in our home that says, "In the good times, praise God, in the difficult times, seek God, in the quiet times, worship God, and in the painful times, trust God, every moment, Trust God". How often do we wait to go to God when things are dismal, just to say please help me? Or how often do we go to him just to say thank you for something? Our prayers matter, and what we pray for matters. Not that God is concerned with long, drawn out prayers full of syllables, He is concerned with the sincerity of our heart. Are we truly coming to Him knowing that He is God and that He is hearing our words? Knowing that He cares and is concerned for our lives? So, like the picture says, when times are good it is imperative that we give thanks. When times are difficult, we must seek His

guidance and will. When times are quiet and serene it is a good time to go to the Lord just for closeness, and when times are painful it is important to go to him for deliverance. We are not meant to be alone and as He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden, He longs to walk with us in our daily lives. This was something that resonated with Jabez as he went to the Lord with his thoughts. As someone who may have felt alone or forsaken, he knew that he had Yahweh on his side.

Forsaken by his mother and likely his father, he quite possibly didn't share the blessings that his siblings were blessed with. When it comes to land and livestock, I believe that he quite possibly got the short end of the stick. This would lead Jabez to pray for blessings and the enrichment of his borders. In Psalm 115:12 David says, "The Lord has been mindful of us, He will bless us, He will bless the house of Israel, He will bless the house of Aaron". Jabez understood God had made promises that He would keep, and he insisted on this being his prayer. God has reminded us time and again that He is faithful and keeps His promises. As a matter of fact, the prophet Isaiah said in 25:1 "O Lord, You are my God, I will exalt You, I will give thanks to Your name. For You have worked wonders, plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness." From the very beginning, He made promises that He has kept and as Isaiah said, his faithfulness has never been less than perfect. So, as Jabez prayed for blessings, so to may we pray for blessings. It is natural to pray for job promotion, higher numbers at a church service, a blessed marriage, many things. However, let us be mindful that as Jabez prayed for blessings, it stemmed from a lack of in accordance with his siblings (I believe), but most certainly not out of greed. He is concerned with our struggles but not with our desire to own a Learjet or a Picasso.

As Jabez prayed for blessings, he didn't forget to pray for Gods hand to guide him. Notice that he says "...that Your hand will guide me, and that You would keep me from harm and that it would not pain me." I firmly believe that every prayer that we pray ask for God's guidance. In the garden, as Christ taught us to pray it began with a recognition of God, His authority, the supremacy of His kingdom, followed by His will. Notice what the apostle John said in 1 John 3:22

“and whatever we ask for we receive because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.” Jabez was certainly a man of integrity who sought God’s will and kept His commandments because it said that God granted Him what He requested. God is not a magic genie that is there to grant our wishes, but He is faithful to the ones created in His image and does not desire to see anyone struggle or suffer. Notice what John says just two chapters later in 5:14-15 “This is the confidence that we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him.” What we see there is confidence on our part, not that we always get what we want but that if it is according to His will, it will be granted. In 1 Thessalonians Paul tells us that above all else, God’s will for us is our sanctification.

There is much to be learned from a man that gets two verses of scripture. It is not kind to pass our resentment on to others, we can always change the path that it seems we were given, God is concerned with our well-being, He hears our prayers, and He is faithful. If you feel like your path was chosen and it is a path of misery, know that you can always turn to the Lord in prayer, He hears you, He loves you and He is faithful.